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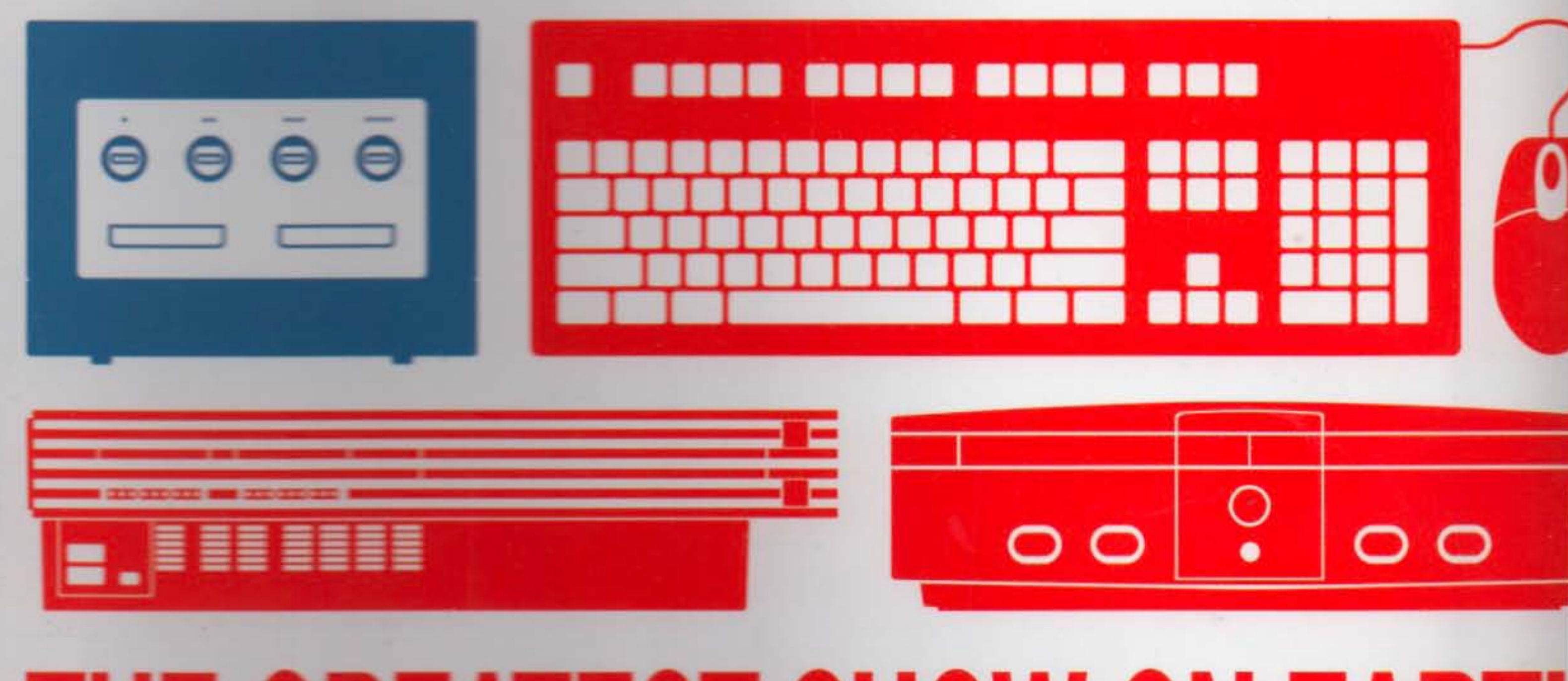
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Free 'Edge E3 Experience
Previewed: the 130 most im
games from the world's mo
important videogame exhibi
Reviewed: Enter the Matr
Force, PlanetSide, IndyCa
Rise of Nations, Castlevar
C64 collector's feature; Biffo
The making of Stunt Car Ra

E3 2003

Edge picks the stars from LA's Electronic Entertainment Expo



THE GREATEST SHOW ON EART


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No DVD? You might want to see your newsagent about that, as they say.

This month **Edge** goes to E3 and we decided you should come too, hence the covermount. Produced by Gamer.tv, it should give you a flavour of what it's like to venture on to the show floor of the biggest (and almost certainly loudest) videogame exhibition on this planet.

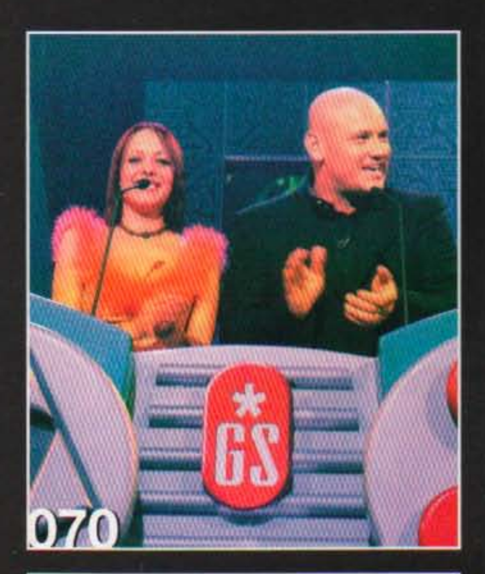
It was, despite all the ridiculous levels of increased promotional activity that only America can provide, a fairly inhibited show. Sony had little (particularly European and Japanese) presence, Microsoft didn't bother having a party and Nintendo had its poorest stand of the last five years. There were no surprises (Sony's PSP announcement had been rumoured and is, shall we say, a little 'early'). There was even a noticeable reduction in both the number and the extravagance of company freebies, much to the chagrin of the materialism-driven US media contingency.

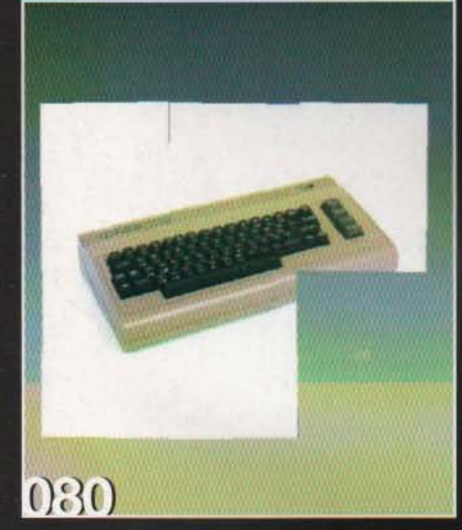
Yes, as many rightly pointed out, the general level of games has gone up. But that just increases the overall average and, if anything, makes differentiating one game on one company's stand from its seemingly identical twin on another that much harder. And the 'me too' quotient was certainly out in force this year - if **Edge** didn't see another WWII-inspired FPS or RTS ever again it wouldn't necessarily miss them. But don't take it from us, see what our guest columnist (and former **Edge** editor) this month has to say on the E3 matter (p26). We feel it's a rather astute assessment.

Of course there were games worth discovering and games worth catching up with again, and we've done our best to put together what we feel represents the most considered selection from the show. See what you think...



Features





E3 Prescreens

























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directory july

the 'there is no magazine' issue

Regulars











Testscreen

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Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4
Software: QuarkXPress, Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia FreeHand, and Microsoft Office **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica [illegible] Light, Roman, **Medium**, **Bold**

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"Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet."

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ATARI
ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO
AMERICA'S ARMY

Sony's surprise handheld kicks off E3

PSP proves to be the talk of a show dominated by World War II, connectivity and, above all, noise



There were few surprises at the ninth Electronic Entertainment Expo after it rolled into Los Angeles at the start of May. Sony continued to ply numbers to prove PlayStation2's continued dominance, and reasserted EA's commitment to its online strategy; a rather contrite Nintendo admitted to making mistakes and looked to GameCube/Game Boy Advance connectivity in the future; and for Microsoft it was all about the games. Again.

10.00am, Monday May 12, Capcom Producer's Day, Westin Bonaventure Hotel: As last year, Capcom begins the proceedings by organising the first press conference of the week, again in familiar surroundings. Around 100 journalists, most of them visibly jetlagged, gather for the morning session and after a brief speech by the company's PR personnel (in which we are told that 2003 represents "the biggest year for Capcom to provide maximum entertainment to gamers of all ages") the first of ten producers from the company's various development studios speaks.

10.05am: Hiroyuki Kobayashi, from Production Studio 4, shows off *Dino Crisis 3* for Xbox. After a short cinematic (the final game contains 60 minutes' worth directed by the production team behind the 'Godzilla' films) it's time for the in-game demo. The camera appears a little lazy which makes fighting awkward but this is still an early version, the producer explains.

10.25am: Atsubi Inaba takes over with the gorgeous *Viewtiful Joe* (p61), still looking as promising as the first time **Edge** saw it back in **E**118. Inaba-san reveals that true physics apply to all special moves and many encounters take the form of puzzles (for instance, when faced by helicopters, using the slow-motion option decreases the speed of the rotors which leads to the flying machines plummeting from the sky). Over the next few days it will become one of **Edge**'s favourite games of E3.

10.45am: Time for a new game. Studio 1's Yoshihiro Sudo reveals *Gotcha Force*, a GameCube exclusive (see p34).

11.00am: Studio 2's Keiji Inafune then brings out *MegaMan Network Transmission* for GC. Developed by Arika, it's a cel-shaded return to the best that classic 2D platforming has to offer and its inclusion here is most refreshing.

11.10am: Another *MegaMan* title, this time *X7* (p60) on PS2 and presented by Kouji Nakajima, from Studio 3: eight levels mixing 2D and 3D action and introducing a new character, Axl, in addition to MegaMan and Zero. Choose two and switch between them for strategic play (Axl, for example, can hover to reach new areas or impersonate enemies).

11.30am: Mark Rogers of Sudio 8 reveals *Maximo vs Army of Zin* (p60), follow-up to last year's enjoyable *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* spiritual remake. Slight graphical improvements lead a host of other, more significant alterations that should enhance *Maximo*'s already enjoyable play mechanic without severely disrupting it.

12.00pm: Inafune-san returns, this time to show how *Onimusha 3* (p60) has progressed since its first appearance in March. The trailer still has Jean Reno's character leap into action along to Mozart's Requiem but soon we're shown in-game footage. A new weapon, a whip, is unveiled and the mention of additional playable characters is welcome.

12.20pm: Inafune-san then slices straight into *Onimusha Blade Warriors* for PlayStation2 (p60). He claims this is an interesting venture for him as he has little interest in the beat 'em up genre but from what **Edge** has seen you'd find little evidence of that in the game itself. It's not a revolutionary title, by any means, but it's a solidly designed concept.

12.30pm: **Edge**'s waning concentration is suddenly boosted by the arrival of Tsuyoshi Tanaka, of Production Studio 1, and his friend *Resident Evil Outbreak* (p34).

1.00pm: Another new title: *Monster Hunter*. The realtime footage reveals a fantastical land of brown mountains and vast green valleys where characters wielding massive, flamboyant weapons that fuse contemporary and medieval origins run around doing battle with fierce, impressive dragons. As with *Outbreak*, Tanaka-san states that the game will feature both online and offline elements.



Trust us; this picture is from this year's E3, which once again saw prominent Atari sponsorship and a US army appearance

7.00pm, Monday May 12, Microsoft Xbox Press Conference, Grand Olympic Auditorium:
After a hotdog or three from one of the many conference kiosks, **Edge** finds a seat close to the stage where three DJs are seemingly doing the job that in Europe you would normally see being carried out by a single person. But everything's big in America. Indeed, the large concert venue is filling up rapidly such is the event's popularity.

7.30pm: **J Allard**, Xbox general manager, takes over DJing duties proving that one person suffices after all. Two minutes later he joins **Robbie Bach**, chief Xbox officer, and **Ed Fries**, Xbox content vice president, who have arrived on stage. "We have delivered [on last year's promises]," the Xbox holy trinity informs the crowd before briefly running through the usual corporate backslapping. Still, it's a confident start to what will turn out to be a confident, polished, short and sharp presentation.

7.36pm: Microsoft's focus this year is games and to prove the point *Doom III* footage kicks off proceedings, looking particularly close to its PC counterpart. Fries returns to talk briefly about Live before more rolling footage, this time from *Project Gotham Racing 2* and *Star Wars: Republic*

Commando, LucasArts' Unreal-engined firstperson shooter (also coming to the PC) expected summer 2004. The latter is received enthusiastically by the predictably excitable crowd, despite only being a prerendered cinematic.

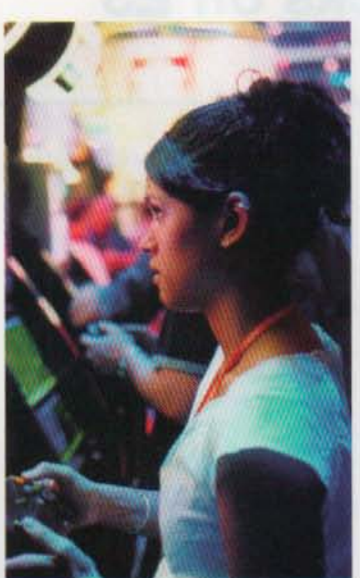
7.40pm: Fries shifts the focus to Japan and displays Level-5's beautiful MMRPG, *True Fantasy Live Online* and Namco's interesting firstperson adventure, *Breakdown*, as examples of Microsoft's commitment to entice eastern developers onto Xbox. It's not the most convincing show and ultimately does little to appease **Edge**'s concerns regarding Xbox's situation in Sony's home territory.

7.45pm: There are "more than 100 Xbox Live titles" on the way. Cue E3 2003 Xbox video. Rare's *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* (p45) kicks off proceedings to wild hollering, as are, subsequently, *Conker: Live & Uncut* (p63), *StarCraft Ghost* (p67) and, bizarrely, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (p62).

7.55pm: Fries returns to unveil *Xbox Music Mixer*, a $40 (£24) interactive media player with karaoke, VJing, and photo album viewing functions featuring obligatory PC media sharing and Xbox Live support. The crowd receives this well, having presumably forgotten the fact that only 12 months ago Microsoft had stated it was more than happy to leave the murky world of multimedia to one of its rivals…

8.00pm: Allard walks on stage to reveal the next exciting development in the Live service. Live Now becomes the lobby for players to meet, chat, find out who's online, team up, check rankings and other information. Live Alerts allows you to receive game invites on your PDA, mobile phone or instant messenger-equipped PC while Live Web is a site holding live stats and friends lists. Finally, more games will be Live Aware,





so friends can send you invites even though you may be engaged in singleplayer fun.

Allard also announces XSN Sports, a new service for owners of Microsoft's Xbox sports titles that kicks off this autumn with *NFL Fever 2004*. Players can create their own teams, schedules, organise tournaments, check their ranking and more on a Website that updates every 15 minutes with the latest information and game highlights. It's a neat community-building pursuit though faces potential stiff competition from EA's own PS2-specific option (see SCEA press conference below).

8.05pm: Fries introduces *Halo 2*. The crowd goes ballistic. Go to p44 for **Edge**'s reaction.

8.15pm: Bach's back. "We're not waiting for the future. We're creating that future now," he boasts before leaving the (clearly convinced) crowd buzzing. Once outside, the usual fight for taxis begins…

Microsoft's message was all about the games. Except for *Xbox Music Mixer*, which seemed to be about branching into multimedia applications. No volte face there then

9.00am, Tuesday May 13, SCEA Press Conference, Los Angeles Center Studios: Having eventually managed to return to its hotel the night before, **Edge** arrives at Sony's now traditional conference location, picks up a croissant from the vast breakfast buffet and waits for the conference doors to open by chatting to a selection of the assembled international press.

9.40am: Kaz Hirai, SCEA president and COO, walks on stage to, by typical standards, muted applause. This, he declares, is "an industry in transition" before going on to play SCE's usual numbers game: 22.21m PS2s in the US; 16.29m in Europe; and 12.70m in Japan. "There's a place you can find the other consoles and that happens to be in the rear view mirror," he boasts while **Edge** remembers the time when SCE didn't feel the need to even mention the competition. Impressive figures, certainly, but ultimately we're here to see the software. Hirai-san goes on to mention *MGS3* (p40) is a PS2 exclusive, as is the next *GTA* instalment, at least initially. The crowd remains underwhelmed. Blame jetlag

9.50am: *Rise to Honor*, a new game featuring Jet Li, is unveiled (p66). We're shown a brief 'making of' video featuring an interview with and footage of the martial artist during motion capture sessions. The game uses both analogue sticks for combat and while interesting it still looks (and, as **Edge** would find out later by trying it, feels) clumsy at this stage.

9.55am: A *Gran Turismo* video showing the evolution of the series is shown before Kazunori Yamauchi, president of Polyphony Digital, shows up on stage to present *GT4* (p51). Again, a making of video is played detailing the team's travels to places such as New York and Paris in the name of research while also hinting at an in-game pit crew, a first for the series.

10.04am: Hirai-san returns to unveil the PS2 Online Pack which bundles the Network Adapter with an upgraded PS2, which features progressive scan playback, an integrated remote IR sensor, DVDR/RW compatibility and reduced fan noise operation, for $199 (£121). He also announces a PS2 branded headset for online gaming and, more interestingly, mentions EyeToy.

10.10am: Dr Richard Marks, inventor of the ingenious device, turns up to demo his creation. In total, 12 games ranging from simple-but-fun rhythm action to ninja-



Like everything at E3, the Microsoft conference was big, brash and busy. But it was a confident performance, and won the approval of a lot of attendees













Sony's statistical approach reflected its continued dominance of the sector – but there was a time when the company didn't feel the need to allude to the competition

bashing activities are included on the disk. And it seems to work, too, with Hirai-san and Marks getting involved in some twoplayer window-cleaning action. EyeToy is out in the US in October, priced at $40 (July in Europe, £TBC).

10.15am: Hirai-san continues solo to underline Sony's belief in making its console's online component an extension of the PS2 experience, thus building on the gaming community it already enjoys. Currently there are more than 608,000 network PS2 users in the US, where 58 per cent use broadband. Critical mass, he informs the crowd, is 1m with the overall lifetime goal being 5–10 per cent of the installed PS2 base. Hirai-san then lists the games that he believes will drive PS2 owners online: *SOCOM II*, *Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain* (p66), *Final Fantasy XI* (p66), and in a move that should worry Microsoft, all nine EA Sports online-enabled titles are announced as exclusive on PS2 for the '03–'04 season.

10.24am: On cue, EA president and COO John Riccitiello appears from backstage to present his company's line-up, as he did last year. Six titles have been set up in the auditorium to be played online against opponents across the US as a demonstration of the service. **Edge** can't be certain, but some of the presentations appear staged, particularly one which has Tiger Woods (via video link) playing against actor/comedian Cedric the Entertainer (on stage). Still, a strong message is delivered.

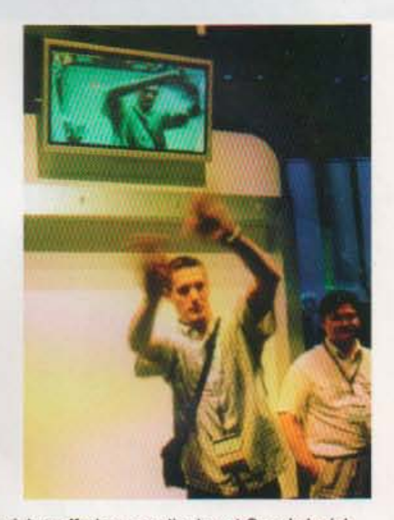
10.40am: It's time for some PlayStation business market expansion. **Ken Kutaragi**, Sony Computer Entertainment president, takes Hirai's place and "to celebrate the PlayStation's 10th anniversary" reveals what many expected to be revealed: the PSP, Sony's entrance into the handheld gaming arena. Finally, the crowd wakes up. The specs are announced (see p15) together with the tentative release date (Q4, 2004) and the machine's storage medium is unveiled. Given the absence of anything other than a specs list for the actual machine, cynical minds are quick to point out that this is Sony's way of bolstering what is, by the company's usual standards, an otherwise lacklustre pre-E3 conference. A shot at trying to steal the limelight away from its competitors' own announcements. And it works. Well, with some people at least. But just to reinforce the message, Kutaragi-san fires off one more line before leaving the stage: the PSP will be, he states, "the Walkman of the 21st century."

10.50am: Hirai-san returns to close the proceedings. Sensing the finale, a considerable number of journalists rudely leave the room either pathetically keen to grab themselves the traditional end-of-conference goodie bag or secure a place on the free bus to the subsequent Nintendo event. Most likely, both.

11.30am, Tuesday May 13, Nintendo Press Conference, The Grand Ballroom Hollywood & Highland:
What a surprise – the doors aren't even open yet and already the event feels oversubscribed. The press registration area – thankfully mainly the US segment – is overrun with 'journalists' stumbling over themselves, a uniform look of desperation at the thought of maybe, just maybe, not making it inside the Grand Ballroom in time to see the Great Miyamoto-san. When registered they rush to the holding area where waiters with empty platters (Nintendo fansite editors are a ravenous lot) struggle to cut their way through the heaving crowd, the majority of which can be found (im)patiently waiting pressed against the obstacle impeding their progress inside. Once the doors open, the predictable whooping begins, closely followed by the frantic quest for the best seat in the house.

11.45am: Having casually strolled into the





Gran Turismo 4 **and EyeToy were the most promising offerings on display at Sony's lavish, multi-tiered stand, attracting a fair amount of attention, as did a sizeable online section**

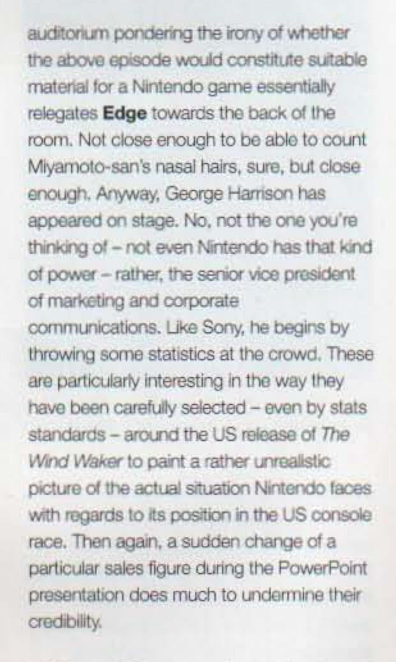
PSP Specs

Sony's announcement of its forthcoming handheld was a little lightweight on detailed specifications but here's what **Edge** has unveiled so far:

Display: 4.5inch backlit widescreen TFT LCD (480 x 272 pixels)
Storage medium: 60mm optical secured ROM disc with cartridge (Universal Media Disc)
Video CODEC: MPEG4
Graphics: 3D polygon/NURBS
Sound: PCM (built-in stereo speakers, stereo headphone output)
I/O: USB 2.0, Memory Stick slot
Battery: Rechargeable (lithium-ion)

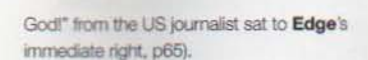


Nintendo's pre-E3 conference was as oversubscribed as in recent years. The shot above captures a quieter moment

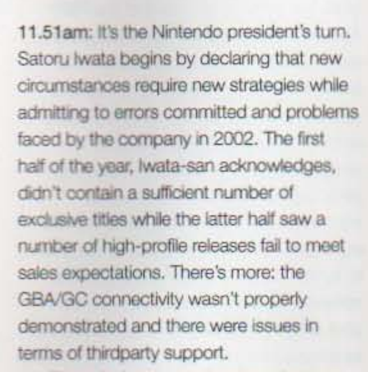


auditorium pondering the irony of whether the above episode would constitute suitable material for a Nintendo game essentially relegates **Edge** towards the back of the room. Not close enough to be able to count Miyamoto-san's nasal hairs, sure, but close enough. Anyway, George Harrison has appeared on stage. No, not the one you're thinking of – not even Nintendo has that kind of power – rather, the senior vice president of marketing and corporate communications. Like Sony, he begins by throwing some statistics at the crowd. These are particularly interesting in the way they have been carefully selected – even by stats standards – around the US release of *The Wind Waker* to paint a rather unrealistic picture of the actual situation Nintendo faces with regards to its position in the US console race. Then again, a sudden change of a particular sales figure during the PowerPoint presentation does much to undermine their credibility.

11.48am: Still, the game footage begins and so does the whooping. *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* (p47) leads the way, closely followed by *Pikmin 2* (p65), *Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire* (GBA), *Wario Ware Inc* (GBA), *Pokémon Colosseum*, *Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros 3* (GBA and recipient of the biggest whoops), *Billy Hatcher & the Giant Egg* (notable for the total absence of whoops, p49), *Donkey Kong Country* (GBA), *Wario World* (p65) and *Star Fox 2* (prompting a, frankly unjustified, "Oh my God!" from the US journalist sat to **Edge**'s immediate right, p65).



11.51am: It's the Nintendo president's turn. Satoru Iwata begins by declaring that new circumstances require new strategies while admitting to errors committed and problems faced by the company in 2002. The first half of the year, Iwata-san acknowledges, didn't contain a sufficient number of exclusive titles while the latter half saw a number of high-profile releases fail to meet sales expectations. There's more: the GBA/GC connectivity wasn't properly demonstrated and there were issues in terms of thirdparty support.



Bizarrely, Iwata-san then launches an attack on *Vice City*, asking how far the videogame industry is prepared to go and citing TV and films as examples of media that have found their limits. He then reassures the crowd that Nintendo understands the current videogaming situation and has therefore taken action. The company's internal development capacity has been increased, he informs us, a Tokyo office has been set up (**E**124), and, crucially, there has been a drive to encourage thirdparty support. Cue *F-Zero GX* and *Rogue Leader III* (p43) footage, much to the delight of the crowd.

12.02pm: Continuing the theme, a video message from Shinji Mikami assures the crowd that he is still very much at Capcom and currently working on *Resident Evil 4* for the GameCube, which he claims is the scariest game of the series yet. "Don't pee your pants!" he warns before a sequences c the game are shown.

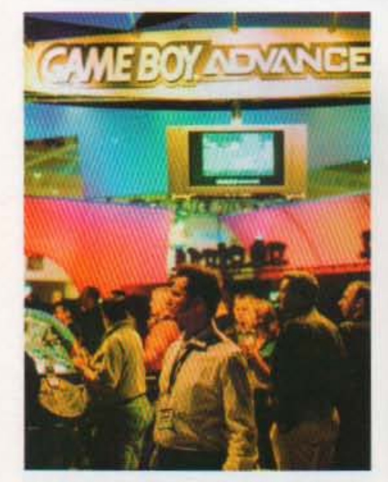
12.05pm: *Geist* (p64) and *FF Crystal Chronicles* (p66) complete the thirdparty invasion. A decent selection, though one that will hardly see Microsoft or Sony runnin for the Hollywood hills.

12.07pm: Which is why Shigeru Miyamoto i now on stage to talk about firstparty software, NCL's strength after all, and particularly the issue of GC/GBA connectivity. It's surprising, though pleasing, to see him soon joined by Will Wright who is here to lend his support to the two *Sims* titles being developed for the GC and GBA (naturally, the two connect).

12.12pm: EA's John Riccitiello makes his second appearance of the day, this time in video form (presumably he's stuck in traffic somewhere between the Sony and Nintend conference sites), giving his company's support to the cause and again highlighting the planned console/handheld connectivity of the forthcoming titles.

12.14pm: *The Legend of Zelda: The Four Swords* for GameCube featuring ingenious GBA connectivity is shown (p64).

12.16pm: Toru Iwatani, *Pac-Man* creator, plays Miyamoto-san, Harrison and resident



Edge hates to say this, but Nintendo had a fairly disappointing show, with a lot more averageness on display than usual

NoA translator at Nintendo's version of this classic (p48) for the rights to the game. It's a reminder of the often playful nature of Nintendo's conferences. Nintendo wins… but only just.

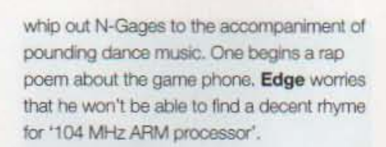
12.22pm: Hideo Kojima presents *MGS: The Twin Snakes* but the screen is too dark to really make out the action bar the odd splash of blood. **Edge** would catch up with the game at the show (p65).

12.30pm: Iwata-san returns, shows a brief video of general games footage and then, defiantly, sends out his parting message: "We will not retreat. The successor to GameCube is already in development and this time we will not let competitors get a head start."

1.30pm, Tuesday May 13, Nokia N-Gage Press Conference, Park Plaza Hotel: Nokia's long, teasing launch campaign for the N-Gage mobile games console comes to a dramatic (though not always for the right reasons) end at the grand Park Plaza Hotel in downtown LA. The telecoms mega-corp has hired the building's lavish ballroom for its big press song and dance, and proceeds with an event that precariously mixes earnest Finnish businessmen with US theatrics.

2.00pm: Several hundred of the world's tech press take their seats in the ballroom and root around in the free Nokia backpacks on each chair, fruitlessly searching for a complimentary N-gage.

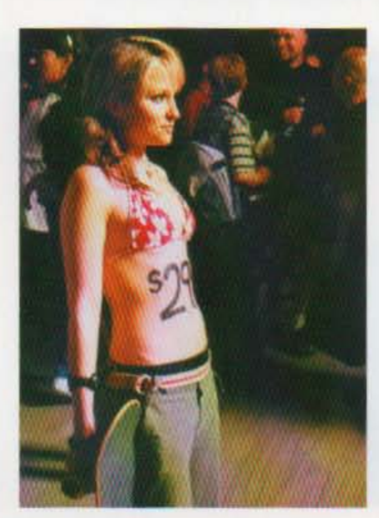
2.05pm: Suddenly an assortment of trendy looking youngsters skip onto the stage and



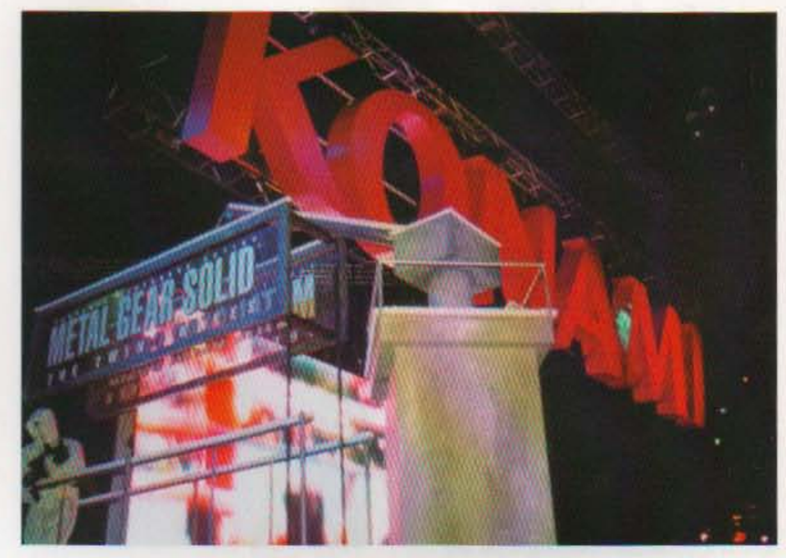
whip out N-Gages to the accompaniment of pounding dance music. One begins a rap poem about the game phone. **Edge** worries that he won't be able to find a decent rhyme for '104 MHz ARM processor'.

2.10pm: The music fades out and Nokia's general manager of entertainment and media, **Nada Usina**, strides onto the stage. She is the tallest woman on Earth. "Nokia is all about mobility," she asserts, accurately. She then explains that only Nokia can bring the worlds of gaming and wireless communications together, and talks about creating and growing online gaming communities – clearly a priority with N-Gage (perhaps because online play via GPRS will provide a lovely new revenue stream for the network operators).

2.20pm: Nokia's executive vice president, Anssi Vanjoki takes to the stage. He reveals some of the latest games announcements, most notably Ubi Soft bringing *Ghost Recon*, *Splinter Cell*, *Rayman 3* and *Marcel Desailly Soccer* to N-Gage. Then a cute blonde model strides on carrying a skateboard – she flips it round to reveal the title *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* scrawled on the base. The crowd whoops its approval. Vanjoki also announces that Nokia is working on its own game, an online multiplayer strategy titles named *Pathway to Glory*, set in the midst of WWII. The game will involve dozens of players competing against each other via GPRS. Easily the most interesting announcement so far, eclipsing the endless roll-out of old licences and PSone conversions. *Pathway* isn't due till spring 2004, though.



Nokia flew out some Hoxtonite skateboarding types to demonstrate its understanding of the gaming market. And then scrawled the price – a rather steep $299 – on their bellies



Oh. My. God. Yes, *Metal Gear Solid* held US attendees in delirious rapture over the three days of E3, though admittedly the crowds had thinned out by the end of the show

2.25pm: Finally the meat of the show. Vanjoki reveals the release date as early October. Pauses. Milks his moment in the limelight, then caves in and gives the date. October 7. With ten games at launch and 20 by Christmas. Hard facts at last. "But what about the price?" Ansi begins teasing once more.

2.26pm: Seemingly aeons later, the cute blonde model from before comes back on stage, and bizarrely peels off her t-shirt revealing a tiny bikini top. Oh and the $299 (£181) launch price written across her stomach. **Edge** is uncomfortable. She looks about 15-years-old, and in any case, $299 is surely the absolute *most* Nokia could have charged for this thing – $99 would have more than earned the big build-up. $199 would have deserved a drumroll at least. But $299?

2.28pm: Normality is resumed with a video of **Jon Romero** talking about his forthcoming N-Gage conversion of *Red Faction*. "The future of gaming is in mobile entertainment," he announces confidently. The words 'kiss', 'of' and 'death' spring mischievously to mind.

2.29pm: A voice offstage declares "I believe everything that guy said," then Jon Romero strolls on. He is obviously there to give stature to the event. An effect ruined moments later when Nada Usina arrives and towers menacingly above the diminutive programming legend. He looks uncomfortable.

2.30pm: Ilkka Raiskinen, senior vice president of the Entertainment and Media Business Unit, arrives on stage (note: all the Nokia execs are wearing jeans. Hey, this is a games launch after all) and interrogates Romero about N-Gage development, and the new game genres that should emerge as developers begin to harness the multiplayer online element. It has the air of a communist show trial. Romero mentions the joint possibilities of location-based entertainment and bluetooth connectivity. "I'm really excited about being able to walk into an airport and check out who's playing and who wants to play and just get right in."

Gamer.tv DVD

For this month's covermount, Gamer.tv's hard-working crew was 11 strong, utilised four cameras, shot a total of 52 hours of footage and conducted 62 interviews from a studio erected in one of the Convention Center's parking lots to escape E3's halls of din (though being under LAX's flightpath didn't help matters much).

The first interview to be filmed during the exhibition was with Shiny's David Perry. The last was with journalist John Gaudiosi who was delivering an E3 video diary. Predictably, the least popular question with interviewees proved to be, "What are your favourite games of the show?"

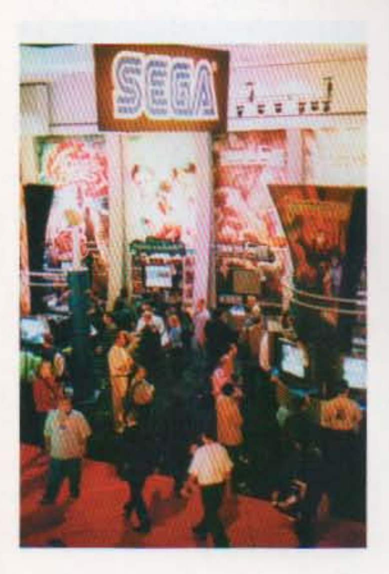
Most deft interviewee: the Nokia spokesperson refusing to be phased by repeated questions about the ambitious $299 (£181) N-Gage pricepoint.

Later, **Edge** checks this out with Romero. Apparently it is already technically possible to create an in-game service that checks your immediate vicinity for N-Gage owners who are up for a game.

2.38pm: Thor from Ideaworks3D shows off the N-Gage conversion of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* – a port of the PS original. Impressively, he reveals the game's twoplayer bluetooth 'Tag' minigame by setting up two N-Gage units on stage. The connection is seamlessly achieved, the framerate slightly choppy, but evidently playable. Good stuff. He then goes onto reveal a new Time Trial mode in the *Tomb Raider* conversion. Players will be able to complete an obstacle course then post their times on a dedicated site. Others will then be able to download the data and race against a 'ghost Lara'. Intriguing to say the least. Later, Ideaworks3D CEO Adrian Sack tells **Edge** about his plans to release a construction kit so gamers can create their own Time Trial courses and upload them to the site.

2.44pm: A proposed video of N-Gage game clips breaks down. Raiskinen looks momentarily confused and then enraged. A questions and answers session is proposed, in which a line-up of Nokia experts gently avoid answering the questions properly. The lights come up. Everyone checks their N-Gage bags again, just in case. Slightly disappointed, they begin to file out.

2:00pm, Tuesday May 13, Konami Press Conference, Mark Taper Auditorium, 630 West 5th Street:
A typically bizarre LA venue greets journalists as they file over a lush red carpet and into a college lecture theatre. President and CEO of Konami America, Tomofumi Gotsubo, begins by introducing the forthcoming speakers and asking that attendees save their applause until the end. There's some embarrassment as at least half the audience ignores the request.





Ubi Soft's stand was pretty impressive, combining a lot of variety with a lot of quality. And that's just the Clancy titles

2:15pm: Whoops and hollers greet Hideo Kojima as he takes to the stage but then proceeds to baffle everyone with an excruciating speech playing on the word 'three'. All is soon recovered as a video shows *Boktai* (p40) followed by *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* (p65) and then *Metal Gear Solid 3* (p40). Journalists seem excited by the footage of Snake's new adventure but there's hardly the emotional outpouring witnessed at previous shows. A typically inane question-and-answer session rounds things off and Kojima-san seems a little disappointed that no one is interested in *Boktai*.





3:45pm: After a short break COO of Konami America, Geoff Mulligan, showcases a reel of Konami's upcoming games. These include the promising *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence* and *Gradius V* (p62) but also the uninspiring *Apocalyptica*. He also prepares the audience for a surprise guest speaker at the end of the show.

4:15pm: Koji Igarashi, producer of PS2 *Castlevania* (p39), shows off his latest game with great enthusiasm. The title gets a very warm reception though one eastern European journalist nervously asks, "What will make it different from the N64 game?" "Everything!" replies Igarashi-san with relish.

4:45pm Attendees reassemble to await Konami's final game announcement and special guest. There's some curtain fumbling and light dimming but finally the guest emerges from behind the drapes. It's Jennifer Love Hewitt with a toy microphone. She ably demos the excellent *Karaoke Revolution* (developed by Harmonix) before moving onto an acoustic rendition of three songs from her new album. It's clearly the hardest audience she's ever had to crack.

Wednesday May 14–Friday May 16, Electronic Entertainment Expo 2003, Los Angeles Convention Center
If the pre-show conferences hadn't already instilled a sense of déjà vu among attendees, the show itself was about to do its best to oblige. As ever, E3 proper began with a (free) breakfast briefing from Douglas Lowenstein, president of event organiser, the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA). And while he covered mod chips, MIT's Games to Teach, mobile gaming and a review of the year's sales figures, his chief call was for more innovation to



Sega's multiplatform strategy produced a host of PlayStation2 titles, and was a typically eclectic display that included European titles, *Warhammer Online* and *Worms 3D*



maintain the growth of the industry, warning of an over dependence on licensed product.

But E3 isn't really the best place to look for innovation; it's not that it wasn't there, rather that, like last year, it was drowned out by the much more numerous and loudly publicised hordes of me-too genericism. Because, again like last year, this was a show that was characterised by a substantial reliance on licensed and franchised product. And maybe **Edge** is getting old, but this year's show seemed even more loud and confusing than it has been in previous years (with Midway, EA, Eidos and Vivendi among the worst culprits).

Of course there was the usual selection of booth babes and free stuff, reducing grown adults to drooling mobs which matched anything that the likes of *Resident Evil Outbreak* had to offer, while Solid Snake once again reduced the crowds to incoherent sobs and indeterminate guttural noises that **Edge** assumes were favourable. And in addition to the heavily armoured vehicles out front, members of the US army rappelled in from helicopters every day to build on last year's presence – and in a clear show of allied solidarity it occupied a booth next to the excellent UK State of Play stand. Even the floor layout was virtually identical to last year's.

Kentia Hall, for example, had all the hallmarks of a car boot sale, taking place in a draughty car park, offering a home to the more desperate end of the E3 spectrum. Nevertheless, the grilled cheese sandwich stand proved to be a lifesaver the morning after **Edge** abused Babel's hospitality in the plush surroundings of the Mondrian hotel.

There were a couple of notable differences this year though, such as the ubiquity of games based on real world military conflicts – and particularly World War II. Or the non ubiquity of new entrants; Nokia's N-Gage was tucked away at the back of the South Hall, while the fact that there were attempts to generate interest in two new consoles and a Palm-based handheld probably escaped most attendees.

In any case, and in spite of the lack of any genuine surprises, E3 2003 had a heck of a lot to offer the determined and intrepid explorer. Shortly before the show floor was officially opened, Sammy announced *Seven Samurai 20XX*, for example, with legendary comic book artist Moebius and Akira Kurosawa's son on hand to endorse its creation. Or there was the sizeable Korean contingent, such as NCsoft, which demonstrated the fruitful results of the country's burgeoning online economy from a prime position in the South Hall. Indeed, pretty much every big player had something to shout about; *Thief III*, *I-Ninja*, *Castlevania*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Viewtiful Joe*, *Vampire the Masquerade: Prince of Persia*, *Billy Hatcher*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *Pac-Man*, *Broken Sword*. Whether sequels or licenses, these are not games that indicate any lack of innovation in the videogame industry.

Edge's full round up of the games on show starts on p31.







It could be Edge's ageing brain, but E3 seems to get louder and less tolerable with each passing year. Still, plenty to see

CUTTINGS



Evolutionary finance

World Rally Championship developer, Evolution Studios is to set up its own development funding project, named Devolution, which will see the company invest in the creation of new development studios throughout the UK. Similar in nature to Lionhead's Satellite system, the project will see investment from the private equity, venture capital and bonding sectors, in an attempt to emulate the financing arrangements favoured by the film industry. Overseen by managing director Martin Kenwright, and chairman Ian Hetherington, Evolution intends to provide the financing to create several independent development studios, but also to provide them with the benefits of shared technology and management skills. The first studio to benefit is Bigbig Studios, which was founded two years ago and is headed by Jonathan Webb, and Richard Ogden.

Sega restructures

Following the failure of merger talks with both Sammy and Namco, Sega is expected to lay off up to 20 per cent of its workforce as a result of reducing the number of its development subsidiaries from ten to just four or five. As discussed last issue, the proposed Sega/Sammy merger fell through because of disagreements over management control, but this was followed by Namco withdrawing its own merger proposal due to Sega's reluctance to enter into talks. The collapse of these talks is thought to have precipitated the company's decision to restructure, which will also result in Sega's president, Hideki Satou, stepping down to become the chairman of the company with Hitmaker president, Hisao Oguchi, stepping up as his replacement. As **Edge** goes to press, the company is still in talks with Electronic Arts regarding a possible North American sales alliance.

Spyglass to sue Bam!

According to a news report by Reuters, Spyglass Entertainment Group is to sue Bam! Entertainment in a bid to reclaim unpaid royalties for its *Breath of Fire* videogame, based on the film of the same name. According to the news agency, Spyglass claims, in a lawsuit filed in Los Angeles Superior Court, that Bam! has refused to pay over $260,000 (£160,000) in royalties.

It's bad news for Bam!, which is currently facing possible delisting from the Nasdaq after the continued underperformance of its share price.

The geeks shall inherit the developing world

An opportunity for game professionals to give something back and help the developing world

Pop-up penance

Zuckerman admits that in some ways Geekcorps is penance. In 1994, he dropped out of graduate school to join friends in developing "one of the first 'pure' dot.com companies," Tripod. "It was a 1995 idea, Linux to Web analogue, with obvious and important applications like Instant Messaging and Chat."

Originally intended to be a library of content services, it quickly became the Webhosting company purchased by Lycos in 1998 for a cool $58m (£35m). However, before he made the sale that earned him the right to never work again, he imprinted his lasting legacy into the annals of Internet history: pop-up advertising. "Yes, I was responsible for putting together the first code. The first pop-ups were Tripod's." Looks like he's got a long way to go to achieve forgiveness.



Geekcorps offers people with technical skills the chance to give something back, by helping developing world countries



Geekcorps, a US-based non-profit organisation, has generated an opportunity for games professionals to use their skills to change the world. Started in 2000 by Internet veteran **Ethan Zuckerman** as a way to "take the world wide web to the whole wide world," Geekcorps has mushroomed into the foremost avenue for IT philanthropy. "That tagline is being phased out," says Zuckerman. "The goal we're heading for now is digital independence. I want every nation of the world to have enough indigenous talent and expertise that they're able to take care of themselves."

Under the auspices of the organisation, western professionals are selflessly exporting their experience to places such as Ghana, Rwanda, Lebanon, Romania, Thailand, Bulgaria and Somalia to work with indigenous companies in their own environments so the companies can break through the digital divide. Geeks come from all walks of IT, from games to wi-fi to networking to design to music to art. "There's a wide range of people," explains Zuckerman. "We even have people geeky enough that they've done chip design."

"I want every nation of the world to have enough indigenous talent and expertise that they're able to take care of themselves"



The Geekcorps Website lists ways in which people can help contribute

"We recruit at trade shows where there are people involved in OpenSource and Linux," explains **Stephanie Lindenbaum**, Geek recruiter. "A lot of the people working with them understand the movement and how it can benefit society."

Most of the Geek work centres on developing alternative solutions to existing limitations. The most pressing issues are those relating to governmental infrastructure systems, like banking databases or polling networks. But it's not just about writing code. "In Bulgaria we sent a guy in quality and assurance to instruct four different firms in what QA actually is," says Zuckerman. And more recently, the world's leading expert in wi-fi technologies completed his second tour in Ghana in order to work on productivity issues that develop around their non-existent telephone networks.

Although there are over 1,000 people on the Geekcorps waiting list, Lindenbaum is still on the lookout for people with skills that match the needs of countries. "Although we don't send volunteers on projects with developers who are looking to create, say, a Ghanaian version of *The Sims*, a Geek project would be a great opportunity for someone with really advanced programming skills to understand the flexibility of IT. Just as a drone programmer who works in a boring company gets his or her eyes opened to the potential of developing Java applications for developing-world software architects, so can a game producer realise that they can assist low-level developers to create something revenue-generating out of technologies that have become old hat for them, but still work wonders in the developing world."

For more information, visit the Website at www.geekcorps.org

Sony unveils new console

But don't get too excited...
it's not the eagerly awaited PlayStation3

As **Edge** goes to press, Sony's consumer electronics division has just unveiled a new multimedia device based on PlayStation2 architecture. The new device, called PSX, consists of a PlayStation2 in a newly designed casing, which incorporates a TV tuner, hard disk drive and DVD recorder, transforming the console into a multimedia device capable of allowing game and video downloads – essentially a home entertainment server. It's set to launch in Japan by Christmas, with a western release to follow early next year.

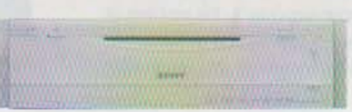


The new device is a bid to boost the company's ailing consumer electronics arm with some gaming division success

The new console was revealed at a shareholder conference at which chief executive Nobuyuki Idei was attempting to assuage shareholder criticism following the company's largest quarterly net loss in more than eight years, and on the back of a fall in the share price to a seven and a half-year low. Indeed the company's financial losses for the fourth quarter to the end of March this year were massively in excess of analyst expectations, prompting this attempt to cross-pollinate its consumer electronics arm with technology from its hugely successful gaming division in a bid to reassure investors that it can still dominate the home entertainment market.

It also marks a more widespread move into the development of Internet services, chips and technologies, which is eventually expected to produce a server-based PlayStation3, for which PSX will provide a useful intermediate transition. The fact that the PSX is compatible with a USB memory stick may also suggest that it will be able to share data with Sony's newly announced PSP handheld. Expect a full report next issue.





The wobbly disk tray of the original PS2 has given way to a more advanced disk entry system appropriate to its sleek look

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Soul Calibur II	GC, Xbox, PS2	Namco	In-house	9
Amplitude	PlayStation2	SCEA	Harmonix	8
Dodonpachi: Dai-Ou-Jou	PlayStation2	Arika	Cave	8
Eve Online: The Second Genesis	PC	Simon & Schuster Interactive	Crowd Control Productions	8
MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology 2	Xbox	THQ	Climax Motorsports	8
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	PlayStation2	Capcom	In-house	7
Dynasty Warriors 4	PlayStation2	Koei	In-house	7
Made in Wario	Game Boy Advance	Nintendo	In-house	7
Medieval: Total War - Viking Invasion	PC	Activision	Creative Assembly	7
P.N.03	GameCube	Capcom	In-house	7
Silent Hill 3	PlayStation2	Konami	In-house	7
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Game Boy Advance	Nintendo	Camelot	6
Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus	Xbox	Microsoft	Studio Gigante	5
Vietcong	PC	Take 2	Pterodon	5
Warrior Kings: Battles	PC	Empire Interactive	Black Cactus	5
World War II: Frontline Command	PC	Koch Media	The Bitmap Brothers	5
Clock Tower 3	PlayStation2	Capcom	Sunsoft	3



Soul Calibur II



Amplitude



Dodonpachi



MotoGP: URT 2

CUTTINGS



Edge presents Equip

The second edition of **Edge presents: Equip**, dedicated to Nintendo's GameCube, will be available from all good newsagents from June 5. In this issue, **Equip** features exclusive interviews with Nintendo Europe chief David Gosen, Game Boy Advance SP designer Kenichi Sugino, and Nintendo legend Shigeru Miyamoto. The magazine also looks at the future of GameCube-GBA connectivity, the Nintendo brand, and ten of the most important forthcoming GameCube titles, including *F-Zero GX*, *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* and *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles*.

Government organises Japanese trip for developers

The government is providing an opportunity for 15 UK videogame companies to visit Japan later this year, to meet Japanese publishers, developers, and media representatives. Recruitment has begun for Play UK in Tokyo and Osaka, October 27–31, 2003, a trade mission offering companies an opportunity to participate in a business development mission to Tokyo and Osaka, assisted by the British Embassy in Tokyo and British Consulate in Osaka. The trip will be the fourth such visit, and having attended last year's, **Edge** can attest to its usefulness.

Eligible companies receive a contribution to their costs, and they will be able to take advantage of business support services available for a fee from the British Embassy. Applications must be submitted before June 20, 2003. For further information contact Kevin Coleman (japan_now@alliantus.com), and for an application form contact teresa.montero@tradepartners.gov.uk

Apology

In the Awards feature in **E**123, we made reference to HotGen Studios in an article, which was factually incorrect and misleading. **Edge** would like to apologise to the company, its staff and customers for this unfortunate mistake and looks forward to collaborating with HotGen on its forthcoming games and products. HotGen can be contacted at www.hotgen.com

Planting the seed

Developers have always found it easier to create games with corridors rather than lush foliage, but Bionatics' natFX is closing the gap between rendering trees and metal plate

Persistent trees

Its client list is a measure of how far and fast Bionatics has wowed the games industry. Ubi Soft, Rockstar, Microsoft, Eidos, EA and Atari are among the publishers who have signed up to use natFX in forthcoming titles. Another emerging market for the package is persistent online games. It would be possible, for example, to integrate the technology into in-game time systems, so trees would change colour and lose their leaves in time with the changing game seasons. Bionatics says it's involved with several such games in currently development but won't provide details citing commercial confidence.

If the writer **Joyce Kilmer** famously dreamed she would "never see a poem lovely as a tree," what chance do those who inhabit virtual worlds have? More complex even than the rounded surfaces of the teapots beloved by 3D demo coders, trees are notoriously difficult to recreate in the computer-generated realm. Not only is there massive variation in size and shape between species, but some varieties boast millions of leaves; far too many to model, let alone individually render. It all combines to make the standard developer response to the problem of the tree – a pole topped by two textured planes at 90 degrees to each other – even more galling.

Thankfully, however, there is a solution. Developed by French software company Bionatics, with research from the Centre for International Cooperation in Agronomic Research for Development (CIRAD), natFX has quietly been populating game developers' arboretums.

"Traditional plant modelling techniques were limited which is why many game developers chose to avoid them," explains Bionatics' **Nikolaj Nielsen**. Bionatics has developed a solution to the problem, called natFX. "It allows developers to rapidly generate photo-realistic trees that take polygon count and texture management into account without sacrificing detail," Nielsen says.



A clever aspect of natFX is the automatic level of detail code which means developers can specify the resolution of trees, ranging from hundreds to hundreds of thousands of polygons

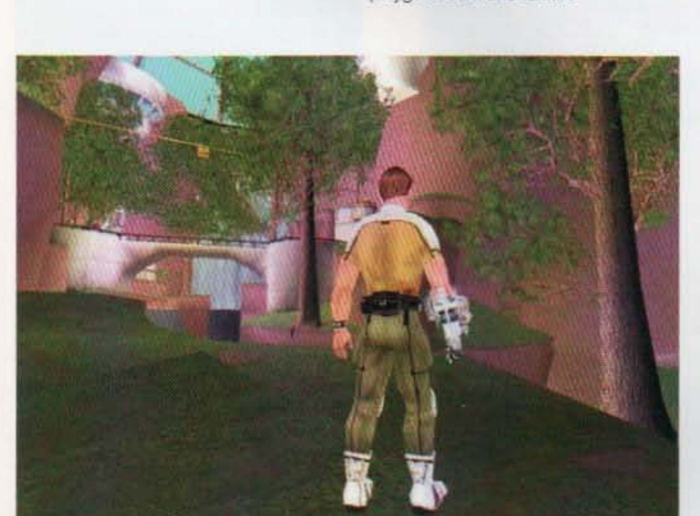
The initial research from CIRAD led to the creation of a system for simulating tree and plant growth based on their genetic make-up, which was first applied by landscape designers, architects and city planners. Further development on the processor-intensive core has seen the release of the game-focused package natFX. Available as plug-ins for both Discreet's 3ds max and Alias|Wavefront's Maya 3D modelling tools, as well as a runtime solution for engines including Criterion's RenderWare, natFX enables developers to import plants and trees simply and quickly into their game environments. Behind the scenes, however, the technology is anything but simple.

"There are various degrees of usability," Nielsen points out. "The most straightforward way is to select a virtual seed, set the final age and season of the plant and then click the position within the workspace." Combining the seed type with the desired final results, natFX then grows the plant using what Nielsen describes as "procedural 3D modelling which includes an expression of the trees' and plants' genetic code."

Another crucial element for meeting the realtime constraints of games, is automatically handling the resolution of the finished models. "Once the plant is created, a level of detail model is generated and implemented into the game engine," says Nielsen. "Each plant is modelled using a hybrid 2D/3D mode that computes trees by combining 2D billboards and 3D geometry to ensure the optimal polygon count, as specified by the user." The bottomline is natFX can create realistic-looking trees between the range of a couple of hundred to 100,000 polygons.

Studios using Maya, which is the lead development platform for natFX, can also dynamically animate their trees using either the package's particle or sub-divisional surfaces systems. "natFX v2.0 has advanced features that allow Maya users to make the tree's leaves drift away in a breeze or have a branch spring back and forth," Nielsen says. And Bionatics has plans for the future too. It expects to add to the over 500 tree and plants types already available, as well as providing for the creation of fantasy-style trees.

Poetry aside, it seems that when it comes to trees in games, at least, the view is becoming increasingly lovely.

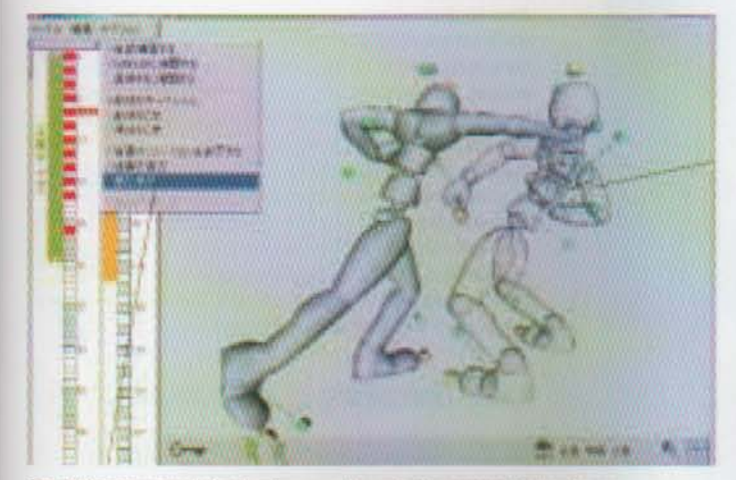

Forthcoming games using Bionatics' natFX for their foliage needs include EA's *MoH Rising Sun*, Ubi Soft's *Rainbow Six 3: Ravenshield* and LucasArts' *RTX: Red Rock*



www.animanium.com

Hop, skip and jump

Sega's Animanium package applies a novel mixture of Japanese expertise in anime and robotics to the problem of character animation



One of the many ways Animanium improves the animation process for developers and animators is in its ability to display another character as a background prop









Getting the most out of what you've got is becoming a crucial issue for development studios – particularly as the visual quality of games is now so high. And nowhere is this concern better demonstrated than the area of character animation. Games characters typically have ten times as many motions compared to previous generations, so developers need ways of working much more efficiently than before. But while new approaches such as emergent movement using ragdoll physics or virtual motion capture are making their impact in western development, one company, at least went back to basics.

The goal of Sega's Animanium was the desire to create a package which could be used to generate the type of high-quality 2D animation that underpins Japan's anime culture, while also enabling game developers to make great 3D character animation.

Bizarrely, at the time the project started, Sega had plans to diversity into its domestic animated TV market. It was as Sega's Future Product Research Group wrestled with this problem that it came across research being carried out at Tokyo University's Research Institute Hitohiko Nakamua. It had been working on the science of how a humanoid body reacts to movement – mainly for application to robots. In the process, it had created what it called its human-shaped self-reliance action simulator. This program could calculates in realtime the interaction of a body as it moved and reacted to obstacles, using advanced inverse-kinematics. This is a standard animation technique whereby the positions of limbs and body parts are calculated from the location of the extremities, generally feet and hands, as well as the rotation of joints.

Living doll

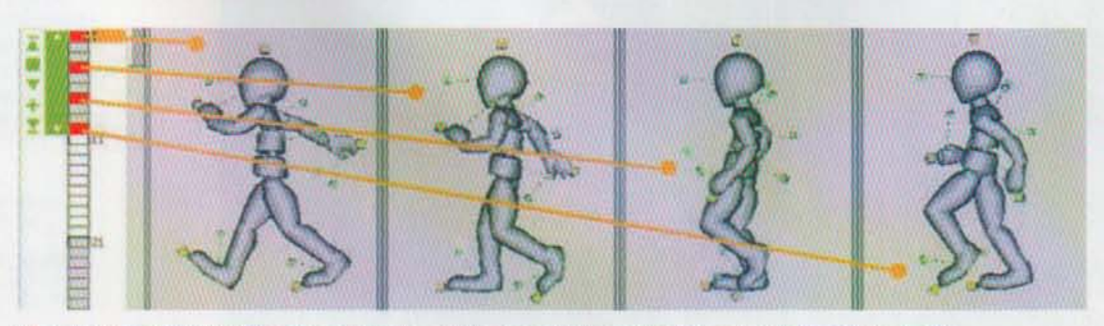
Taking this core technology Sega came up with Animanium, which combines ease and speed of use with the quality of the finished animation. One key feature is its interface, which unlike the menus and options offered by packages such as 3ds max and Maya, is clean and simple to get to grips with. It's also easy to start work quickly, as the only parameters that have to be set up are the skeleton's joints, then the character can be dragged around the screen in a way Sega claims is similar to playing with a doll.

Another departure from western methods of character animation is that Animanium does away with the fixed three-dimensional axes approach. Instead it uses a dynamic method, which always keeps the centre of the character on a sight-line axis.

In part, this is function of Animanium's 2D heritage and is something Sega claims makes it much easier to produce the subtle nuances which make for great character movement. Once completed, animations created in Animanium can be exported into other more mainstream packages including 3ds max, Lightwave and Maya using converters.



Designed to be simple and quick to use, Sega has only recently released Animanium outside the Japanese market



The starting point for any would-be animator is the classic walk cycle. Sega's Animanium should make it much easier to complete

OUT THERE

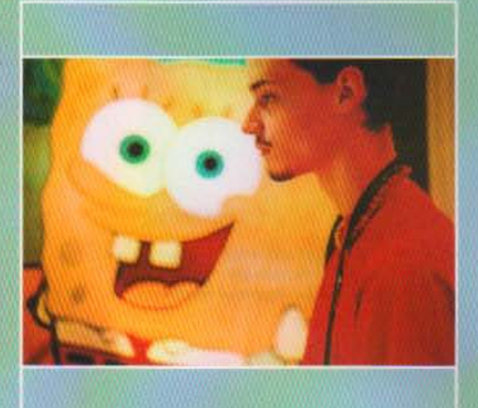
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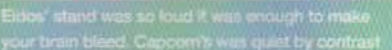
01



A taste of home – Nokia put on a bus service to its poor press conference. You've done it now, Butler

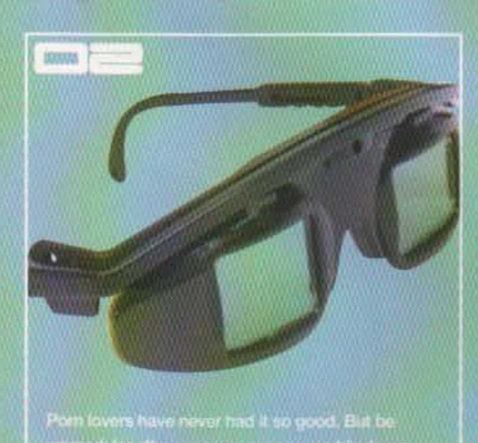




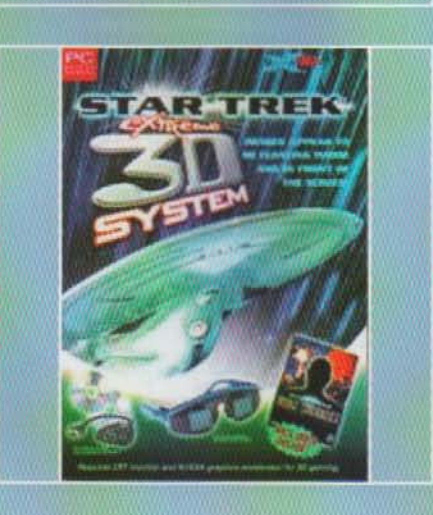


Eidos' stand was so loud it was enough to make your brain bleed. Capcom's was quiet by contrast

02



Porn lovers have never had it so good. But be warned: lengthy exposure may cause blindness



01 Busman's holiday

US: First things first: the best booth babes were on Nintendo's stand. And considering there was almost one for every demo pod, that's a lot of Nintendo love in the room. (Shame none of them knew which buttons to press.) If you've been to E3 before you know exactly what to expect. If you haven't, then just imagine being in an episode of 'Chegger's Plays Pop' with American accents. It's all about getting noticed. Hire in a couple of large-breasted girls and the nerds will flock. (**Edge** even heard a rumour that one booth babe applicant, after a rejection, went back for an 'audition' after surgical enhancement and got the job.) Nokia's ploy, along with women in tow, was to bring a bit of Ye Olde England to the event. Its London buses certainly caught the eye outside the press conference, but didn't inspire anyone to actually play games on its devices. Special prizes go to Eidos for the noisiest stand; Atari for the best popcorn; Tecmo for the wackiest events, and Nokia for sheer perseverance.

02 Something of a spectacle

US: Much to **Edge**'s chagrin there wasn't much in the way of mad peripherals and Out There fodder at E3 this year (if you've seen one Aeris Gainsborough mobile, you've seen them all). Even the Kentia Hall failed to turn up much in the way of interesting fluff – apart from packs of Iraqi Most Wanted playing cards, no doubt to stay in tune with the general theme of the show. X3D Technologies came closest with its eye-strainingly good 3D spectacles. Demonstrated with glee by staff members the PC images on show were shockingly effective, if a little hard on the retinas. "Our 3D technology uses a series of software conversion algorithms that process over 90m complex image translations per second." **Edge** didn't care: hey, look, there's a Borg coming right at us! The complete X3D PC System can turn any 2D image into 3D on the fly and comes in at $1,600 (£980). Visit www.X3D.com for more information.

Soundbytes

"It's not an educational tool. These kinds of videogames are perceived to be entertainment. But it really is trivialising something that is enormously serious."
Australian Refugee Council executive director Margaret Piper speaks out about a government-funded videogame called *Escape from Woomera*

"As games designers and computer designers, this was the best use of our artistic skills to try and get across the political message that we wanted, and to get across information... in a new way that would grab people's attention."
Kate Wild, one of the game's designers, responds

"It's incredible."
Robin Williams, drawing a comparison between a beautiful woman's rear and Valve's *Half-Life 2*

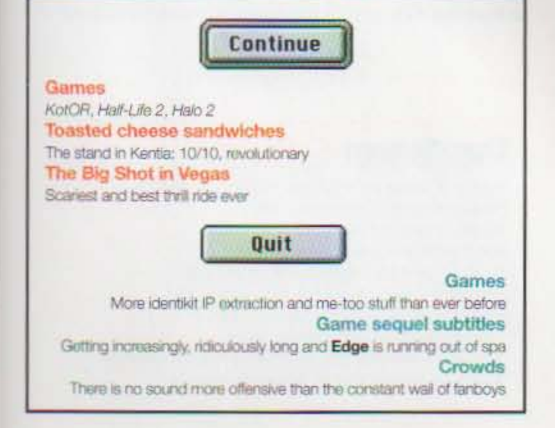
"Jeez, I hate that miserable bitch!"
A US 'industry professional' gets a call from his mom during Sammy's *Seven Samurai 20XX* press conference

03 Floors > mobile phones: official

Canada: Out There 122's astonishing revelation that Hudson has ported *Bomberman* to, erm, ice has evidently inspired developers around the world to look for even more mainstream platforms. This, the work of 20 software engineering students at McMaster University, Ontario, is **Edge**'s favourite: a night-time *Pac-Man* prank writ in 225m of duct tape on a tiled floor. The project took three hours to produce – an exceptionally short development time, even for such a primitive piece of work – and is fully interactive, providing players are prepared to bend down and pick up the beer mats and AOL CDs that play the part of the pills. Unfortunately, the non-existent taped-down AI of the ghosts lets the experience down somewhat, and attempting to go through the warp tunnels on either side of the grid leads the player off the playfield entirely. And where's the bonus fruit? Goddamned lazy students. Go to www.cas.mcmaster.ca/~patels24/kipling.html to see the full photoshoot.

04 Heavy metal

UK: It's not the first Out There story to strain **Edge**'s wrist. If you're thinking about the *DoAX* patch, get your mind out of the gutter, because unwieldy joypads are the section's forte – but said injury doesn't usually come through heavy lifting. Logic3's Pro Dance Metal Dance Platform weighs in at 18.5kg, and at £125 appears aimed at dedicated dancers only. Then again, you could write it off as an investment. This peripheral is exactly the same size as its arcade counterpart, has rubber feet to stop it slipping, and doesn't appear likely to break anytime soon. Install two of them, a plasma TV, a chipped Xbox with *Stepmania* and all the *DDR* song files installed, and you've got the makings of the ultimate *Dance Dance* setup. Of course, if you can afford that lot, you can probably splash out on the arcade machine anyway. And if you're going to do that, get **Edge** one as well, would you? For research purposes, you understand. Thanks.


Continue

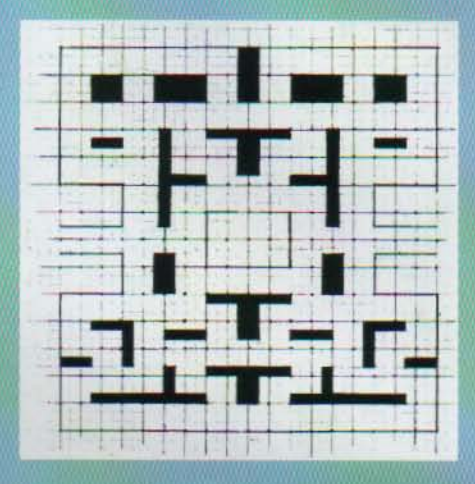
Games
KotOR, Half-Life 2, Halo 2
Toasted cheese sandwiches
The stand in Kentia: 10/10, revolutionary
The Big Shot in Vegas
Scariest and best thrill ride ever

Quit

Games
More identikit IP extraction and me-too stuff than ever before
Game sequel subtitles
Getting increasingly, ridiculously long and **Edge** is running out of spa
Crowds
There is no sound more offensive than the constant wail of fanboys




You're only young once, so why not create a replica of Namco's *Pac-Man*? Take those loans away now




Beer, beer, beer, beer, beer, AOL CD, Pac-puke. Beer, beer, beer, beer, beer, beer... you get the idea




Interior designers are already sizing these up for bathroom floors. Imagine the noises you would make









During the first press demo of *Virtual View* journalists kept their notebooks suspiciously close to their laps



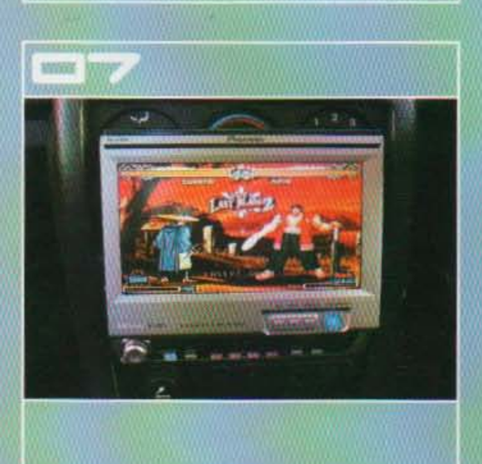
"Don't be intimidated by this apparatus, love – just imagine you're being romanced by a thousand nerds"







Tsunami2002 is every bit as entrancing as the original, albeit without the dodgy Nuon joypad





The Xbox-Linux set-up may be geek heaven, but it does mean Snowdon now needs a HGV licence

05 Candid camera

Japan: If you're a fan of 'Famitsu Xbox' you'll be aware that *DoAX* has been on the cover every month – at least until recently, when the game finally came out and it was left with *N.U.D.E.* Anyway, all that obsession was bound to affect Sony somehow, and goad it into some sort of response. And so it happens, with *Virtual View*, a logical progression from Tecmo's swimsuits 'n' sport game. It removes the unnecessary sporting aspect, of course, and puts you, the player, in the role of photographer at a swimsuit shoot. The PS2 controller lets you manipulate the camera 360 degrees around MPEG2-captured models as they move, take pictures, and admire them at your leisure. Each of the three disks contains 32 minutes of footage; the nude patch is presumably on the way.

06 AINC it funny?

Germany: A German software collective whose philosophy appears thoroughly early-'90s from their techno-demo homepage, AINC's release for the Breakpoint03 96Kb-game competition thoroughly impressed **Edge**. And the judges too, it appears: the game won first place. *Tsunami2002* is a modern version of Jeff Minter's *Tempest 2K*, taking advantage of PC videocards and squeezing the whole game into a space smaller than many FPS textures. The game even lets players use their own CDs as the soundtrack, but 2K purists beware: while Minter's approval was sought for this homebrew version, it wasn't given, and the release – however technically impressive – has, erm, got his goat. Log on to www.ainc.de for more.

07 Portable Xbox

UK: No sooner had **Edge** gone to press mocking the idea of in-car *Halo* (see 'The Joy of Tech', **E**124) than this link arrived in the magazine's inbox. John Snowdon has taken the work of the Freevo and Xbox-Linux development teams, and created an in-car entertainment system using a chipped Xbox, and wired it into his Rover Coupe Turbo. The kit runs a hacked version of Debian Linux, which in turn facilitates a DVD/CD player, and a host of emulators. Oh, and *Halo*, of course. Now, this particular strand of **Edge**'s hybrid mind doesn't know much about cars, but knows enough to be fairly sure they haven't yet developed to the stage where they can drive themselves. And that means pitched battles with Covenant forces are still best left to lucky, lucky backseat fighters, regardless of the temptation to play at being Master Chief on the move. See John's work at www.target-earth.net/xbox/

Data Stream E3 Special!

Number of 'industry professionals' attending E3: **65,000+**
Number of countries represented: **80+**
Number of exhibitors: **400**
Size of exhibit space: **520,000 square feet**
Number of products debuting at the show: **1,350**
Percentage of products available for Christmas: **83**
Number of interviews done by Gamer.tv: **62**
Of those, number of female interviewees: **5**
Number of miles walked per day by Gamer.tv's producers: **13**
Number of cab rides taken by **Edge** while in LA: **36**



08 Oryx and Crake

Despite the genre's fixation on the ones and zeros of digital media, the most interesting science fiction operates on the contested boundary between the virtual and the physical. The prime example is Gibson's 'Neuromancer', which kickstarted cyberpunk, using information as the catalyst to explore the merger of solid-state memory with the human brain's wetware. Taking the slippery processes of genetic engineering as its foil, 'Oryx and Crake' has the potential to be a similarly inspirational starting block.

Told in flashback from an indeterminant time in the future, the last human wraps himself in a tattered sheet to consider his role in the love triangle which bought about the end of the history. Beautifully written, it's nevertheless sobering stuff. As with all dystopian visions, from Swift through Orwell and Huxley, Atwood's purpose is to warn us about our present state. Disavowing the science-fiction label, her research into the progress of genetic engineering means she prefers to consider 'Oryx and Crake' speculation based on what is currently possible.

From transgenic pigs that have been modified to grow human organs, to Dolly the sheep and the bald mouse with the human ear growing out its back, the grotesqueness of experiments undertaken in the genetics lab have never been in question. But what Atwood does is add the hoary old problem of human wickedness. Just because scientists wear white coats doesn't mean they're necessarily good people is her simple twist. The result is a book which, together with Gibson's 'Pattern Recognition', is one of 2003's must-reads.

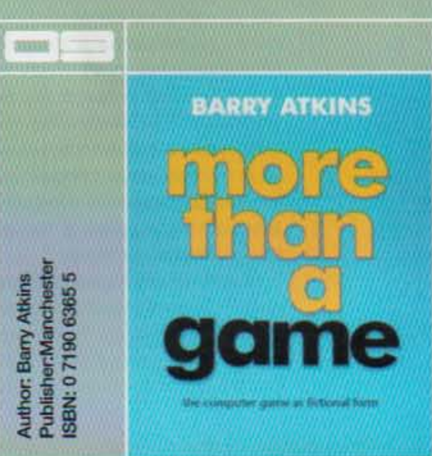
09 More than a Game

With game-related university courses continuing to spring up around the country, the potential of computer games as a field for academic study is finally being fully explored too. In 'More Than A Game', Barry Atkins, as befits his post as a lecturer in English and Senior Learning at Manchester Metropolitan University, takes on the subject of the computer game as fictional form. It's not an obvious topic to tackle, considering the general paucity of most game plots. It's just as well therefore that Atkins, a self-confessed gamer, suggests playing any games generates some sort of fictional strand in the mind of the player. The crux of his investigation is the different forms these can take: the outcome, how this could affect society's view on the cultural worth of games as a form of media.

Employing four examples – *Tomb Raider*, *Half-Life*, *Close Combat* and *SimCity* – Atkins argues even in the most restrictive form of gameplay, such as the mixture of pixel perfect-movement and static FMV offered by Ms Croft's adventures, players can create their own versions of the provided text, even subverting what developers have provided. And it's this freedom, however limited at present, for the player to become in effect an author which gives games their key advantage over other media. As for the future, Atkins' conclusion is that the main barrier to increasing the richness and variety of the game as a fictional form remains the creative scope of designers. Developers, you have been warned.



Author: Margaret Atwood
Publisher: Bloomsbury
ISBN: 0 7475 6259 8



Author: Barry Atkins
Publisher:Manchester
ISBN: 0 7190 6365 5



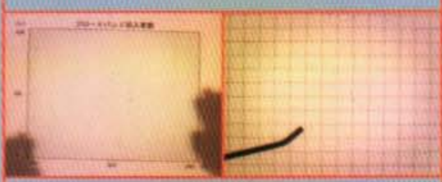
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10 Website of the month

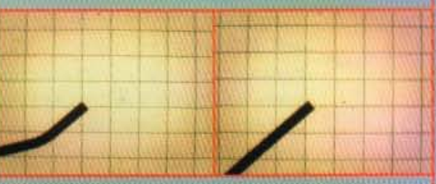
Insert Credit provides Web-based videogame writing with some artistry, and not just because of the beautifully photographed page headers. The site's focus is on the left-field and Japan, but, gloriously, it's almost entirely free of the 'hardcore' snobbery that proves such a cancer for so many of its peers. And sure, the content is sometimes hit and miss, but when it hits, it does so with smartness and wit otherwise almost entirely absent from Internet game critique. The passionate, cliché-free writing drags you to the close of articles, even those on games you couldn't care less about. If there's an Internet site producing better forward-thinking game journalism, **Edge** would love to see it.

11 Advertainment

Japan: There are currently two adverts doing the rounds for the official launch of Sony's PS2 Network Pack, which features a PS2 in a 'skeleton night blue' special colour scheme together with the HDD and the Network Adapter. Anyway, here's one of them...



We find ourselves at a marketing presentation of some kind. A graph is placed on an OHP unit.



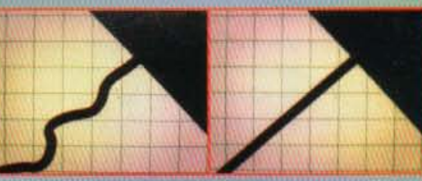
Businessman's voice: "Broadband penetration is exploding," he clearly exaggerates, "Why is this?"



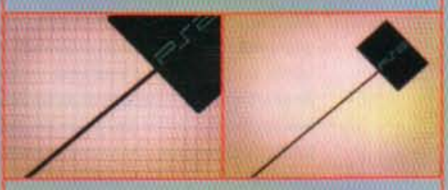
The graph shoots up. Suddenly, it hits something. There's the sound of a cable connecting to a socket.



"Oh?" our protagonist is wondering...



... when all of a sudden a soundtrack straight out of a Mexican fiesta erupts into life.



A voiceover announces: "Broadband. A new playground is born on PlayStation2"



The final message: "Let's all gather on *Mina no Golf Online* on June 12." The PlayStation logo appears.

Larry and Andy Wachowski weren't born as film writers. They were not spoonfed pulped-up celluloid. When their mother changed Andy's first nappy, she didn't find the first draft of 'Assassins' lying inside. They didn't spend their teen years perfecting nasty-ass teen-angst scripts: (INT. LARRY'S BEDROOM: Larry is curled up, foetal, sobbing softly. Camera sweeps through window to EXT. AMERICAN SUBURB where Larry's sweetheart, TRINITY, is kissing the high-school football captain). And they didn't serve apprenticeships in Hollywood, learning their trade and consuming cliché ready to regurgitate.

Still, Hollywood writers they became, surviving the dismal failure of the aforementioned 'Assassins', making a critical success of lesbian bondage in 'Bound', and then writing and directing one of the most successful films of all time. 'The Matrix' – love it or loathe it, and



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

The games industry family is full of inbreds

RedEye's stuck somewhere between, rationally tending towards the latter but camp appreciation of Keanu preventing total dismissal – has perverted every strand of popular culture since its '99 release, not least (the usually insular) videogaming. Bullet-time is as ubiquitous as the black trenchcoat. Success is slow motion.

But that's only fair, since 'The Matrix' took much of its style from videogames too. Famously, the brothers are huge fans of *Tenchu*, making a pilgrimage to Acquire in 1998 to study the way the game was made. The action sequences in 'The Matrix' *are Tenchu*, or at least what you'd imagine *Tenchu* could be in a couple of generations' time, free-flowing and kinetic and absolutely deadly. RedEye has no doubt the Wachowskis will appreciate that when it happens. They are gamers and comic geeks at heart, after all.

Tangent! If you are a student on a games design course right now, then it is quite possible you will be the worst thing to happen to videogames, ever, *ever*. The same goes for if you are someone in testing, hoping to rise up the company hierarchy to a position where you can cause the testers as many headaches as you're getting. If you are a journalist thinking of sidestepping to a job where you can genuinely claim you're part of 'the industry', believing that your contribution will be invaluable thanks to the wealth of knowledge you've gleaned from playing shitty platformers, you couldn't be more wrong.

If the games industry is a family, it is so terribly inbred that the children are ugly hulking brutes built from cliché and learned incompetence. This game is like that game plus this factor from another game. Hey, there's a pitch for you, Activision, or THQ, or Atari, or whoever, anyone, everyone: *Nu Tony Hawk's = Tony Hawk's + GTAIII*. Which is endemic of an industry brought up as cannibals, not as connoisseurs. Where is the videogame equivalent of Mogwai's 'Young Team', of 'Heat' magazine, of 'Remains of the Day' or FW Murnau's 'Sunrise'?

Not as conversions, but as shining reference points in tangents and misdirection and oddness and unexpected beauty. The industry is a two-decade expert at refining genres and crossbreeding them, but when the only points of reference designers use are other videogames, it's no wonder things get stale so quickly. *Max Payne* might have been a wholesale rip-off of a film ripping off a videogame, but at least it was trying to look outside of its own medium for inspiration. People fall out of love with videogames because there are rarely new ideas, and there are rarely new ideas because we don't let people who haven't served their time in our filthy nepotistic underworld play with our brilliant toys. What we should be doing is saying to random creatives, "Come here! We have this amazing, colourful, practically untouched clay for you to shape. It doesn't matter that you don't know how many levels make up an ideal game, or why a meter needs to be charged before you unleash a special move, or even that you don't know what a special move is. Come shape it." What we should be doing is encouraging people like the Wachowskis to get involved with making videogames.

Which they did. And hmm. This is where RedEye's runaway argument hits a speedbump and careers off into a ditch.

The article on reviewing in the last issue of **Edge** was interesting, and contained a lot of the Truth that Needs to be Told – reviews are subjective, and anyone who says they aren't is professing to have some judgemental power that no one aside from God/Jesus/Neo/Keanu could ever possess. That said, as Kieron Gillen mentioned in the feature, there is some level of qualitative analysis that can be applied to videogames, in that some games are definitively bad, broken, flawed, and some games are obviously well produced and entertaining. That analysis can be applied to the videogame of 'The Matrix: Reloaded'. Namely this; *Enter the Matrix*, created by Shiny but with extensive input from the Wachowskis, is *dire*, and no one involved on it on any level deserves to make any money, ever again, for their rest of their stinking, cynical lives.

Seriously. Regardless of personal preference, if a magazine gives this game eight out of ten, you can safely assume they are lying with some dirty ulterior motive. There is barely anything to it, just a glossy *Streets of Rage* clone with redundant bullet-time and dreadful animation. Perhaps it was rushed to meet that all-important street date. Perhaps it was just always awful, flawed in design and executed by money-grabbing fools.

"What we should be doing is saying to random creatives, 'Come here! We have this amazing, colourful, practically untouched clay for you to shape'"

Now, whether this heart-stopping incompetence-turned-concept comes from the Wachowskis or Perry or somewhere in between is moot. The result is wrong, so wrong, but the central idea is *right*. The Wachowskis weren't born into the film industry, nor were they educated or groomed to take some righteous place as creators of 'The Matrix', but found a way in regardless. They sold a composite of comic books, videogames, the Bible and classic paranoia, pumped it full of bad dialogue and great special effects, and made millions. And then they made a really bad videogame, perhaps because while ripping off videogames is what made 'The Matrix' so popular, ripping off videogames is what makes videogames so goddamned boring.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge**'s*

The hero, trenchcoat flying behind him, sprints towards his enemy. At the last moment he pivots, runs up the wall and performs a somersault. As he inverts in slow-motion, he lets rip with his machine pistols, whose bullets seem to punch holes through the very fabric of spacetime itself. Still airborne, he delivers the coup de grâce with a roundhouse kick, and the guard crumples to the floor in a broken, bloody heap as the hero lands on his feet.

The hero turns, and spies another opponent. Again he runs at the wall, but this time he bumps into the concrete nose first and bounces off. Suddenly he appears to teleport a few feet back to the ground, where he lands in an instantaneously new stance. A few bullets thud into him, but that's okay, he's made of super-hard jerky teleporting rubber or something, his nose is miraculously unharmed, and he can try it over again.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Films and videogames: not good bedfellows

Free your mind. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. Glitches in the Matrix reveal themselves in elegant ways, such as the double appearance of a black cat; the glitches in *Enter the Matrix* just look stupid. But even without the unintended teleportations and the raggedly visible seams in the motion capture, the game's fighting somehow manages to suck out all that is beautiful in the films.

It's an issue, as Neo so philosophically intones in 'Reloaded', of control. The films' wire-fu is blessed aesthetically with exhilarating grace, because we know it to be, and it looks to be, dependent on mental effort rather than sweaty physical graft. In *Enter the Matrix*, every failure to perform a cool move, resulting in jerky recovery animations, reminds you that you are pressing buttons. By the time you are getting it right most of the time, on the other hand, it has become routine. In another over-large and under-detailed generic warehouse/facility area, you are doing the same thing you did hours ago. You are, you sadly realise, playing *Max Payne* with celebrity scriptwriters.

Well, you say, what did I expect? This is a film licence, after all. Thousands of Atari *ET* cartridges still buried somewhere in the Nevada desert remind us that the marriage between Hollywood and videogames is usually doomed. But *Enter the Matrix* had everything going for it. This wasn't some rip-off generic blaster/racer with a popular film's title attached, or so we were told. This was a game scripted by the Wachowski brothers, with huge amounts of extra data from the same mocap studio as the films used, with an hour's worth of live-action cinema footage. It was an authorised, independent part of the 'Matrix' universe. And yet with all this in its favour, *Enter the Matrix* clangingly rehearses all the old problems about 'convergence' between games and films, and even invents some new ones of its own.

One of the old ones is the familiar problem of watching versus doing. That distinction may be split into two parts: the visual and the temporal. Visually, the fight scenes in 'The Matrix' and 'Reloaded' create a sense of space by cutting through a collage of camera angles, zooms, pans, close-ups and so on. This kind of kinetic montage creates an almost cubist vision, albeit arrayed linearly through time rather than presented simultaneously, of a new truth in every new point of view. *Enter the Matrix*, on the other hand, necessarily lacks such freedom, because in order that your character may be controlled successfully, he or she must be more or less always centred in a chase-cam view so that you can see what you're doing and what is going on in the immediate environment. Regardless of the technical quality of imagery, it's just not as interesting to look at.

In temporal terms, meanwhile, the problem is that the videogame fights necessarily lack anything like the rhythmic variation you can see in the films; everything proceeds at an average, predictable pace. This too is necessary, since no human can react quickly enough on a joypad to recreate a well-rehearsed exchange of four punch-blocks within a second between two actors on screen. Dumbly pressing one button several times and enduring the small delay before your avatar decides to unleash a flurry of blows is a poor substitute, but what else could be done? Videogames can play with tempo on a larger scale, but it seems that necessarily they cannot compete with the extremely rapid and granular temporal variations available to filmmakers.

Meanwhile, *Enter the Matrix*'s mixture of engine-generated cut-scenes and specially shot live-action footage has none of the absorbing style of the game of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, whose beautifully managed segues between footage and bittage set a new aesthetic benchmark for dealing gracefully with the rival entertainment form. Shiny's game still suffers from a jarring disjunction between the different modes of representation. (So does 'Reloaded' itself, of course: the transitions between live action and pure CGI pseudo-humans boinging around the screen are cringingly obvious. Such aesthetic dissonances only reliably go away when everything is represented in the same mode, as in the truly stunning CGI short from The Animatrix, 'The Final Flight of the Osiris'.)

The most worrying new precedent that *Enter the Matrix* sets, though, with its massively hyped synergy and narrative overlap with 'Reloaded', is that it seems the film itself has been deliberately made to suffer, to donate some of its lifeblood so that its vampiric brood can feed on it. In 'Reloaded', Niobe and her crew go to blow up the nuclear power plant, a feat of security-bypassing which would presumably require something like a lobby scene squared. Instead, we see nothing until they are already in the control room. Why? Because that's what you get to do in the game instead. The film's sense of rhythm and victory over threat is compromised just so we can bash buttons on our consoles at home. It's as though James Cameron had cut footage out of 'Aliens' so that it could be rendered in blocky 2D graphics in the 1987 Spectrum/C64 tie-in game released by Electric Dreams – which remains, actually, a superior film-to-game conversion.

"It seems that 'Reloaded' itself has been made to suffer, to donate some of its lifeblood so that its vampiric brood can feed on it"

If this is convergence, give me divergence as fast as possible. I'm sure the Wachowski brothers, great videogame fans as they are, were originally excited at the prospect of overseeing a game set in their own fictional universe. But I wonder if now they still think it was really worth it.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

As a sizeable chunk of the US videogame industry is located in and around California, the short hop to Los Angeles every year is almost as easy as popping down to the shops.

The unfortunate downside of this is that every big, sweaty dufus in the western states with an avid interest in gaming (and a mate who works at Electronics Boutique) gets to go to the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo, too. And, frankly, it's got to stop.

After eight years and counting, I don't think I speak alone when I say that this annual pilgrimage to the undisputed heavyweight champ of videogaming trade events is beginning to lose its appeal. Aside from the aforementioned problem, which surely ranks as one of the most disturbing new trends (fortunately gamefans are due to get their own show in August this year), 'overkill' pretty much sums up my feelings for E3 year after year. And it comes in many forms:

Too many people.

Too many games.

Too many war games. Too many firstperson shooters. Too many thirdperson action games. Too many 'counter-terrorism' games. Too many stealth games. Too many flag-waving military sims. Too many franchises.

Too many fat people. Too many annoying people. Too many badly dressed people.

Too much waste. Too much noise. Too much bad Convention Center food. Too many cell phones. Too many mullets! Too many pointless gifts.

Too many models in bikinis. Too many under-sexed males staring at models in bikinis. Too many video cameras recording models in bikinis. Too many bad television presenters.

Too many headaches. Too much stress. Too much wasted time... most pressingly, mine.

After this year's show I longed for more innocent times. Yes, it's always easy to wallow in teary-eyed nostalgia – especially for a jaded old sod like me – but there was a time when I really looked forward to attending gaming events – such as the Consumer Electronics Show.

Almost a decade has passed since I was editing **Edge** in the magazine's early days. Back then videogames weren't big enough to command their own US trade event so they'd be found amongst the new TVs and bad-boy car stereos at the Consumer Electronics Show. CES took place twice a year which meant that a year's worth of games – back then a fraction of how many get released these days – didn't need to be crammed into one annual show.

Better still, the winter event took place one week after New Year in Las Vegas – undisputedly the best town in the western United States for celebrating everything that's wrong with America (it even clashed with the porn industry's equivalent of the Oscars).

Summer CES followed six months later in Chicago – a city with a flavour that the uncomfortably pretentious and vacuous Los Angeles simply can't touch.

Back in the day CES was a relatively pleasant experience compared to E3. There were far fewer people in the videogames hall – hardly any compared to today's excesses of over 60,000. So, for example, anyone wanting to play *Super Metroid* on Nintendo's booth could do so without fighting through hordes of fanboys (who hadn't yet started planning their annual vacations around gaming trade events).

The show was also a place to do insightful interviews with the industry's heavy hitters. So **Edge** could always secure decent time slots with former Nintendo of America head honcho Howard Lincoln and trusty old Shigeru Miyamoto.

Not the celebrity Shigs Nintendo now pushes up on to the stage at its E3 press conference every year, you understand, but the shy, engaging and inspiring Miyamoto-san who always delivered the industry's best videogames one way or another, but didn't feel the need (or the pressure) to shout about it.

Everything was much more low key. Easier to separate the wheat from the chaff, and most importantly, genuine innovation from hyperbole. And I don't remember hearing that damned word 'franchise' very often, either. A videogame was a videogame. Not a marketing brief to be built on, year after year, until it's something finally worth playing, worth buying.

Okay, so my ever-so-rose-tinted vision hasn't forgotten that a greater majority of games in the early-'90s were really bloody crap. As vile as E3 is these days, I'm not going to deny that overall standards in gaming have risen exponentially in the past few years. I mean, even THQ is making good games, for Christ's sake!

However, for companies to make a real impression at E3 these days isn't easy. That means vast budgets, a stunning demo that takes months of hard work, and a specially constructed sweatbox with a long line of eager gamers camped outside. Last year it was *Doom III*, this year it was the turn of *Halo 2* and *Half-Life 2*. Big, event-driven FPS blockbusters, served up in true Hollywood-style. How long until will it be until everyone is doing this?



STATES OF PLAY

Jason Brookes

Fear and loathing in Los Angeles

For me, E3 has become something akin to that Japanese gaming show 'Endurance', and it's getting harder and harder to come away with a sense of which titles are genuinely pushing back boundaries beyond the visceral. The overall message is so loud, the graphics so intense and the action so hard-hitting that it's really getting tough for anything to impress me any more. In fact, I think the opposite it happening.

"The overall message at E3 is so loud, the graphics so intense and the action so hard-hitting that's it's tough for anything to impress me any more"

So please, someone, anyone, go in my place next year. You can use my business card. And if you hang around the front of the LA Convention Center after the show you might even pick up a card to get a free lap dance later that night if you're lucky.

Or a groovy pen. Or a keyring with a stupid plastic character on it. Or a bag. Or a black fucking T-shirt (which will surely come in handy for pulling those models in bikinis...)

E3 rocks, dude.

Jason Brookes is the US editor for 'LOGIN' (Japan) and a former editor of ***Edge****. His views do not necessarily coincide with* ***Edge****'s*



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

Too much, too soon – and we're all paying for it

Recently, I visited Minehead in Somerset for an extended, out-of-season weekend of drinking wine from a jug and falling over. The 'Leading Holiday Camp' I had the grave misfortune to stay at was like a sort of Disneyland designed by pikies – a tawdry and soulless, Day-Glo affair, halfway between a concentration camp and a service station staffed by inbred lushes.

I kid thee not; while attempting to do nothing more sinister than buy sweets, I was forced to endure the teller's un-hilarious, 20-minute anecdote about how she and 'Craig' had woken up in a shopping trolley at 4am that morning without any recollection of how they'd got there. All the while being unsure which part of her misshapen, slack-jawed face to look at, on account of the fact that her eyes stared in two opposite directions at once.

That aside, I've always had a soft spot for the UK's more downmarket coastal resorts, especially during the quiet season. There's something uniquely English about the slightly anaemic, enforced jollity, and an appealing melancholy permeating the fish and chip shops, the empty beachfront funfairs and musty, out-of-date arcades.

The latter are always a welcome haven for any games fan who wants to take a step back in time. Minehead's arcades are a typically quirky mix of the relatively recent and the really old and infirm. Thus, strolling through such establishments is like taking a geological drill-core sample of gaming's past.

In any one arcade you might find a rust-flecked bagatelle machine, a battered air hockey table, a fag-burned *Street Fighter II Turbo* cabinet, a *Virtua Racing* playing to no one from behind a dusty monitor, and a spanking new *House of the Dead III* with those excellent pump-action shotlightguns. What strikes home immediately when confronted with such a decades-spanning diorama is the speed at which the games industry has progressed.

Hilariously, I remember playing *Road Rash* on the 3DO and thinking that game graphics really couldn't get any better (then again, I also used to believe that the images on my television were the trapped ghosts of restless sailors). In part, that may have been an over-optimistic assessment, or just a case of misplaced wishful thinking; some small bit of me, at least for a month or four, totally bought into the 3DO dream of a singleformat games industry (nowadays, I'm more sceptical). Alas, as history recalls, fate was the whale to the 3DO's Jonah, and game graphics took a now ubiquitous generational leap within 12 months. Where is 3DO's dream today? Rotting, and jammed in some metaphorical sea-monster's blowhole.

Videogaming advances so quickly, it's a wonder we don't all have the technological bends. From the perspective of someone who flirts with the notion of being a hardcore gamer, it doesn't really bother me. But were I a more casual consumer, I'd find such rapid progress rather intimidating.

From the first public showing in 1895 of moving pictures projected onto a screen, it took 27 years before the first Technicolor feature film was made, and a further five years before we got the first talking picture. And even then it was about a white man singing about his 'mammy' while pretending to be a black man. Admittedly, new technical processes, better special effects and so forth have evolved behind the scenes, but on the whole – as far as the layman is concerned – film-making has advanced in a slow, steady and mostly organic fashion.

Imagine if the film industry had gone from flickering zoetrope imagery to 3D holovision in the space of 15 years. Terrified Luddites would likely have brought about the collapse of ordered society. Aside from the fact that game content is still tailored primarily for the 15-year-old schoolboy in us all, it's little wonder that vast swathes of the public couldn't give a winker's truss for games.

"We're a cult all the same. To the unconverted, we're a bunch of freaks, geeks, and – like it or not, coolboys – hardware-fixated sad cases"

What's that you say? But games are bigger than films or music? Don't be so naive. That's what they want you think. In fact, we're nothing more than members of a cult. Admittedly, we're a huge cult that has sat its pouting buttocks atop the pop culture bubble – but we're a cult all the same. And to the unconverted we're a bunch of freaks, geeks, and – like it or not, coolboys – hardware-fixated sad cases.

Females? Old people? Anyone aged 40 and upwards? Aside from the odd game of *Tetris*, or a rickety and reluctant post-Christmas-dinner spin on a PS2 dancemat, these people care not a jot for our hobby. Those news stories you read about the games industry now being worth more than the music and film industries mean precisely this: Bo-Diddly-squat.

Yeah, more money may change hands between punters and games retailers, but that's primarily because games cost eight times as much as a cinema ticket, and three-and-a-bit times as much as a new CD. Everyone listens to music. Almost everyone goes to the cinema or rents DVDs. Games remain a long way from becoming the same sort of massmarket commodity. And ITV's 'Game Stars' is unlikely to have won over many new supporters.

Getting back to my seaside arcades, the interesting thing was that the people in these places weren't hardcore gamers. They were, I'd wager, a mix of 'Sun' readers, holidaying kids who might own a PSone and, yes, the occasional sweet-peddling lush. To wit: the very massmarket that games allegedly now sell to. From the fact *Star Wars* and *Sega Rally* were getting more interest than *House of the Dead III*, I'd suggest that the common man isn't greatly concerned with realtime lighting or NURBS. He just wants to play games now and then. What's more, he probably doesn't relish the fact that he's continually being told his home hardware is out-of-date – either by virtue of competing new systems, or his console manufacturer's own, catalogue-spoiling, four-year strategy. Yeah, games are getting more popular year-by-year, but if we're not careful this constant race to move forward could eventually end up holding the industry back.

I'm not advocating a single format that hangs around for as long as, say, VHS – or any single format whatsoever. But it would be a safer and more sensible proposition all round for the entire games industry – from the smallest software developer to the most swollen console giant – if a more long-term, unified strategy was considered. What should that strategy be? How should I know? I spend my weekends getting pissed at the seaside...

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge***'s*

Edge's most wanted

Half-Life 2
"Oh my God," whispered US journos during the demo. Giant monsters, extraordinary physics and great AI. Is this the Second Coming? A mattress did float on water.



(PC) Vivendi

Halo 2
Edge is a little bit sceptical about claims that it was played live at the show (it looked a bit prerecorded), but it's like *Halo* but different. And maybe even better.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Gradius V
A lovely ten minute demo was playable on Konami's popular stand. Shame the US journo **Edge** played the game with didn't know how to share power-ups.



(PlayStation2) Konami

Knights of the Old Republic
Another confluence of influences has brought out the geek in **Edge**: BioWare, 'Star Wars' and the 'Wizards of the Coast' D20 rule system. It can't come sooner.



(Xbox, PC) LucasArts

It's that time of year again

Edge loses itself and its bearings at E3

According to the event organisers, this year's E3 saw over 62,000 'industry professionals' descend upon the Los Angeles Convention Center to check out the wares of about 400 exhibitors, who, between them, were showing off more than 1,350 new 'videogame-related products'. While the vast majority of these 'products' are probably just redundant peripherals, these figures are a clear indication that the show offers a unique opportunity to see an incredibly broad range of forthcoming gaming software. But it's worth pointing out that the show also presents even the most diligent videogame journalist with a particular set of pressures and difficulties.

It's an obvious fact that the attempt to play or see such a huge number of games in just three days is doomed to failure – even without a week of hospitality events that all involve significant amounts of free alcohol. Slightly less obvious, apparently, is the way in which the number of games, their varying states of completion, and the different ways in which each is presented, produce an environment in which it is pretty much impossible for even the most assiduous attendee to second guess the eventual quality of any of this unfinished 'product'.

This attempt, by publishers, developers, retailers and journalists to make predictions on the basis of unfinished code and brief demos, is often compared to an attempt to predict the final quality of a film on the basis of a trailer. But it's not even that accurate. A film trailer is intended as a precis, a summary of the film in question. What 'industry professionals' gather together to see at E3 is often actually akin to a few randomly chosen minutes from a film – a much less adequate means of assessing final quality.

This is a state of affairs that's especially unfair on those games, like *Knights of the Old Republic*, or *Broken Sword*, whose languorous style is at odds with the histrionic and hyperactive bid for attention at E3. But it also makes it difficult to assess the eventual impact of the likes of *Half-Life 2* and *Halo 2*, which, while undoubtedly promising, were also among those games that were presented with most care in their own dedicated cinema booths.

Which is a caveat worth bearing in mind as you read **Edge**'s selection of the most interesting titles at E3, presented over the following pages.




035


039


042


047


050

Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines

Format: PC
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Troika Games
Origin: US
Release: 2004

It's the return of the Masquerade. Let's just hope it banishes bad memories of the first videogame outing for White Wolf's seminal ruleset

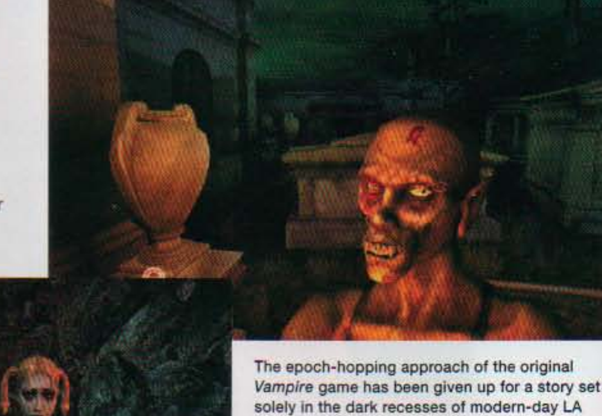
Activision
The biggest surprise at Activision's booth was probably *Trinity*, a hitherto unrevealed firstperson shooter, though the decision to restrict *Doom III* to a rather muted appearance was also rather unexpected. Nevertheless, the company's stand had plenty of other highlights, such as *The Movies*, *Rome: Total War*, *Tony Hawk's Underground*, *MoH* clone *Call of Duty*, and, potentially the most intriguing, *Bloodlines*. All of which offset the licensed tat, such as *Shrek 2* and *Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure* to round out a solid performance.



The original *Vampire* videogame was a pretty poor specimen given the elegance of the pen-and-paper ruleset upon which it was based. But past performance is no reliable indicator of future fortune, and **Edge** is quietly confident that *Bloodlines* will lay the ghost of its predecessor to rest. It's still early in development, and what was on show at E3 was little more than a tech demo, but it gave a good idea of the sorts of environments and activities that will make it into the finished game, as well as offering a glimpse of the *Half-Life 2* engine in action.

The most promising thing about the game is Troika's bid to incorporate a much greater part of White Wolf's original ruleset. A wider variety of skills has been included, for example, and players can now choose from one of the seven core vampire clans and their unique abilities.

The result is a more authentic recreation of the World of Darkness, and one which boasts the sort of emergent design more characteristic of the likes of *Thief* and *Deus Ex*. Therefore, to judge by demonstrations, a Malkavian character might get past a security guard by turning him insane, while a Nosferatu would be able to simply ghost past, and a Brujah by resorting to violence.



The epoch-hopping approach of the original *Vampire* game has been given up for a story set solely in the dark recesses of modern-day LA

True Crime: Streets of LA

Format: Xbox, PS2, GC
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Luxoflux
Origin: US
Release: Summer

Imagine a game in which you can explore an entire city, stealing cars, with gang violence and various weapons, with a branching storyline and celebrity voice actors. No, not that one

There really shouldn't be any surprise at the decision by a major publisher to ape the most successful franchise of recent years. Even so, *True Crime*'s appropriation of the template laid down by Rockstar North is almost shamefacedly unabashed. Action and driving sequences; granting players the ability to "commandeer any vehicle in the game and to target and shoot at perps from a moving car"; a branching story told over the course of 100 missions and supplemented with free-roaming random missions. So far, so *GTA*. The involvement of Chinese Triads and Russian Mafia is hardly a massive departure either – nor the decision to cast players in the role of Nick Kang, a "no-holds-barred badass."

No doubt the biggest selling point is the 250 square miles of LA that's been "accurately recreated", including locations such as Hollywood, Santa Monica, Beverly Hills and Downtown, and landmarks such as the Convention Center (home of E3 no less). Still, the game boasts a more impressive hand-to-hand combat system than Rockstar's, and the engine appears more polished, with none of the camera foibles of *GTAIII* and *Vice City*. Whether it matches Rockstar's humour or design skill is another matter, and not one that will be apparent until it's complete.



It certainly looks sharper than *Grand Theft Auto*, but it's not yet clear whether it will have the wit or, indeed, the soundtrack – though presumably it will, as Xbox owners will be able to rip their own



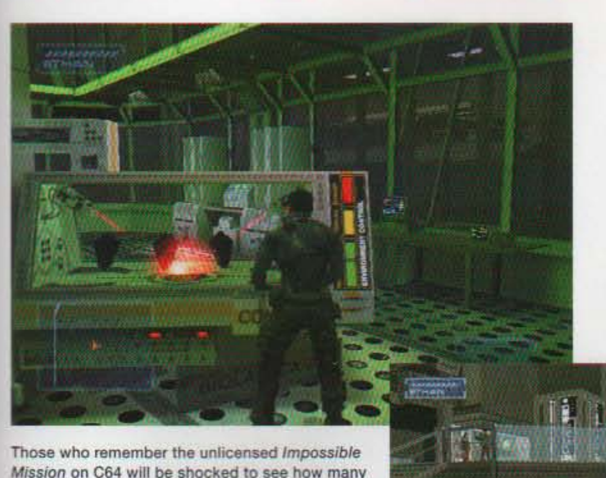


Nick Kang doesn't play by the rules. He's a maverick, etc. Not much in the way of irony, then

Mission: Impossible - Operation Surma

Format: **PS2, GC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **Paradigm Entertainment**
Origin: **US**
Release: **TBC**

Tom Cruise has given his film-inspired videogame the cold shoulder – so maybe he's not just a pretty face



Those who remember the unlicensed *Impossible Mission* on C64 will be shocked to see how many ideas have been covertly taken from other games

It's official – Infogrames has dropped its moniker in favour of 'Atari'. And if you believe Bruno Bonnell it's because he believes that the Atari brand is synonymous with innovation. Curious then that the first title Atari demos to **Edge** is *Mission: Impossible*. There was a lot of cynical product at E3 but this was astoundingly derivative. Imagine the best bits of *Metal Gear Solid* fused with *Splinter Cell*'s gadgets – a statement that must have been spouted at an Infogrames brainstorming session somewhere down the line.

It's not that *Mission: Impossible* is bad. In fact, it looks reasonably polished and robust, but the level of plagiarism on display was stunningly unsubtle. Enemies and cameras appear on a small radar screen, get discovered and an alert is sounded followed quickly by the now familiar 'tension' music. Want to navigate those intruder-unfriendly laser grids? Slip on the infra-red goggles and navigating them will become much easier.

In fairness there are some gadgets that sound interesting. It's possible to take an image of a face with digital binoculars, for instance, so a disguise can be constructed back at HQ. Face-swapping (hopefully better implemented than in the N64 version) is said to be a significant gameplay component. But don't hold your breath.

Atari

With a new name in place Atari was keen to prove it had plenty of innovation on show. It didn't convince. *Dead Man's Hand*, an FPS set in the wild west, was the most interesting new IP – most other titles were blockbusters or big franchises. *Magic the Gathering – Battlegrounds* piqued the interest of card fans, but not **Edge**, while *Kya* and *Greyhawk* disappointed. More promising, if unsurprising, were PC titles, *Unreal Tournament 2004* and *Terminator 3: War of the Machines*.



Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines

Format: **PS2, GC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **Black Ops Entertainment**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

Another blockbuster licence from Atari, but can the game possibly satisfy the hardcore and the massmarket?





Although it's not meant to offer the sophistication of a modern beat 'em up the fighting aspect of the game currently looks very weak indeed



Expect many moments from the film to be replicated in the game, as this is the first *Terminator* title to use the licence to full effect. The PC version, subtitled *War of the Machines*, is more interesting and supports a multiplayer mode

Don't get all sniffy before you've even seen the game. So it's another *Terminator* title, but this one is actually endorsed by Arnie himself. Unfortunately, on present evidence, Schwarzenegger's likeness and 'consultancy' on the game has done little to inspire the developers.

For the most part the game is an FPS and while it may have few obvious technical weaknesses it shows no sign of delivering anything more satisfying than about a thousand other FPSs **Edge** saw at E3. The in-game Terminator models are reasonably well rendered, though their movement is somewhat laborious (maybe they can only attain human agility when fully skinned and clothed?). It's also strange to see them so easily defeated with a few bullets, which undermines the credibility of Cameron's original vision of an almost indestructible mechanical warrior army.

Verisimilitude aside, it's a pity that the largely presentable FPS components are let down by a ludicrous 'beat 'em up' (we have to use inverted commas here) section. While work – clearly – has still to be done, it currently plays like *Rise of the Robots* with better character models. **Edge** dearly hopes this turns out better than *Enter the Matrix*, but will consumers be back after the last *Terminator* travesty?

Resident Evil Outbreak

Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Capco
Developer: In-house (Production Studio
Origin: Japa
Release: 2004 (U

A number of fundamental aspects remain undisclosed and a few bugs need ironing out but things are looking promising for online survival horror

Capcom
The publisher impressed with the breadth and overall quality of its line-up which included obvious sequels to obvious franchises but, commendably, the company flew over the Pacific with a selection of new titles, though not all made the E3 stand (see p6). Interestingly, *Dead Phoenix* and *Red Dead Revolver* were conspicuous by their absence – draw your own conclusions. With regards to what did make the show, you'll find most of the games of note either on this page or in this month's Alphas section (p60).

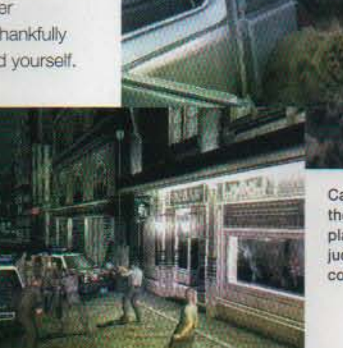


Back in the days of *Resident Evil 2*, **Edge** wondered why Capcom hadn't committed to delivering a twoplayer, link-up version. After all, the game's dual character narrative seemed rather appropriate for this kind of change in game mechanic.

Outbreak allows four players to go zombie hunting online, of course. Select your character from eight suspiciously familiar-looking individuals (Capcom will be hoping the lawyers of Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts and Tom Cruise, to name but three, don't play the game) and while main cut-scenes are shared, each player often gets their own specific cinematic.

The game emphasises cooperation. Zombies are no longer confined to rooms and can follow players through doors but thankfully in addition to weapons you can grab nearby objects to defend yourself. There is also an emphasis on realism – pick up a pipe for instance and it'll bend every time you whack a zombie, until it becomes deformed beyond use.

The E3 demo suffered from a few update problems, with characters occasionally disappearing from screens, and things felt a little slow but expect these to be sorted, including what happens to you when you're dead (currently you turn into a zombie once and have a limited time to be saved before being out of the game).



Capcom is still undecided on whether to make the game broadband-only. In addition to other players, you'll find NPCs that need escorting an judging from the E3 demo, the one button auto communication system appears to work well

Gotcha Force

Format: GameCub
Publisher: Capco
Developer: In-house (Studio
Origin: Japa
Release: October/November (Japan), Winter (U

Mini robot fighting: the latest Capcom announcement strengthens the company's drive to deliver a broad selection of electronic entertainment

One of the games revealed during Capcom's Producer's Day pre-E3 press conference (see p6), *Gotcha Force* is a tale of aliens posing as robot toys in a bid to take over the world. This kind of thing happens all the time and, naturally, it's your job to stop them.

This you do by pitting your team of bots against those of the competition. Think 100-plus (though the team is aiming for over 1000) mini-bots that you can combine at will in order to create your very own fighting force and whose abilities are a direct result of your unifications. The game is primarily a fourplayer experience (two on two or deathmatch, though a CPU contingent can obviously make up the numbers), and when fighting alongside a team-mate the two battling bots can be further combined for particularly noticeable stage presence.

Currently 15 arenas are planned and Capcom is in talks with toy manufacturers for a potential brand extension into this sector. Certainly the game's aesthetic would suggest a younger market than **Edge**'s average reader though on the strength of its E3 appearance we expect the concept to appeal to a broader audience than Capcom's core target demographic, hence its inclusion here.



The action is pretty and pretty smooth. The GC visuals fit the toy theme of the game perfectly





The game has been designed as a fourplayer experience although CPU adversaries can step i

Thief III

Format: **Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Ion Storm**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Winter**

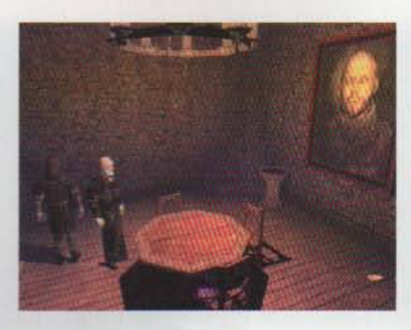
Eidos hopes it will be third time lucky with the forthcoming version of the original stealth 'em up



With a double reputation as a bridesmaid game – twice critically acclaimed, twice commercially ignored – the current incarnation of *Thief* must be the last chance of continuation of the series. Perhaps more galling for developer Ion Storm is the fact that the game's one-time unique selling point, extreme stealth, has since been diluted into the mainstream. Both *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell* have taken the idea of creeping around complex 3D environments, added firearms to the mix and picked up millions of sales.

But if anyone can make it work this time round, it will be studio head Warren Spector, designer Randy Smith and their Ion Storm team. Development is already at an advanced stage thanks to the leg-up provided thanks to technology-sharing with the *Deus Ex II*, and if nothing else the PC version of the modified Unreal engine looks pretty. Particular attention has been paid to the game's colour palette, with warm colours signifying well-lit areas which are best avoided for cool and dark blue and grey corners.

For a game in which the ability to remain invisible is key, the ability to control light is a crucial gameplay element. Using water arrows to take out dangerously illuminative torches is one obvious example, while the ability to interact with the environment; for example by closing an oven door to reduce the likelihood of detection was also demoed at E3.







Another issue that has been carefully thought through is how to provide a physical sense of presence in what is after all a firstperson perspective game. Such body awareness has been accomplished by giving players the ability to see their hands and feet while they move around. Such a view proves useful in the game's lock-picking mode. Again, a dynamic popularised by *Splinter Cell*, it's likely that its implementation in *Thief III* will be a more tense affair.

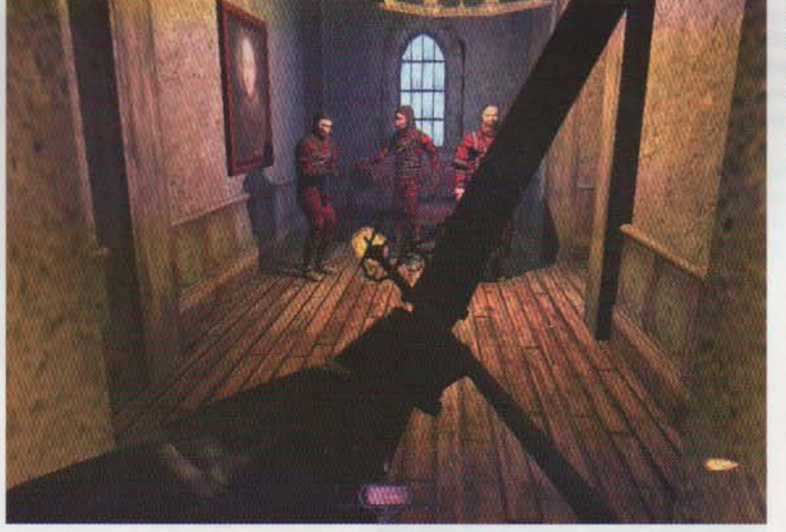
The need to broaden the game's appeal has resulted in some changes however. Master thief Garrett will now be able to climb up walls, giving players full exploratory scope of their 3D environment. Ion Storm's vaunted emergent gameplay philosophy also means it should just about be possible for bow-happy players to shoot their way to victory, with little regard for stealth, although this will be penalised in terms of mission subgoals.











Perhaps one of the weaker areas involved actual combat, with arrow-firing something of a hit-and-miss affair, not helped by the tricky targeting ability of your character. Nothing to do with Edge's aim, of course

The volumetric lighting is very nice and enemies tend to react intelligently to your presence. In terms of atmosphere *Thief III* sets the scene particularly well. City sections are a 'paradise of distraction' where you're allowed to roam, picking pockets and robbing houses as your fancy takes you. Beware though: citizens react to your actions and it may be necessary to move to another district as a result of increased security measures – a professional hazard

Eidos

Long gone is the *Tomb Raider* hysteria that Eidos enjoyed at past E3s (*Angel of Darkness* didn't appear to interest the crowds that much) yet the company was hardly lacking in booth babes this year: a number of barely clothed loons promoting *Backyard Wrestling* kept the ladies entertained (fear not, they were often joined in the ring by plenty of enhanced female flesh). Those that averted their eyes would also have seen playable *DE: Invisible War* and *Legacy of Kain: Defiance* code and, behind closed doors, a promising *Commandos 3*.

Deus Ex: Invisible War

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Eidos Interactive**
Developer: **Ion Storm**
Origin: **US**
Release: **2003**

Previously in **E**111, **E**112, **E**119

The brash surroundings of E3 weren't entirely suited to sampling the subtle intricacies of Ion Storm's conspiracy-laden sequel





The new HUD interface worked surprisingly well, but the responsivity of the Xbox analogue sticks needs to be addressed before the game's release

Surprisingly, and disappointingly, *Deus Ex* failed to impress as much at this year's E3 as it has done in the past – particularly on Xbox. It might have been the constraints of the show or because the more dramatic big-screen presentations of the newfangled likes of *Halo 2* and *Half-Life 2* rendered it rather subdued by comparison. But whatever it was, actually picking up the pad and playing the game seemed somehow less satisfying than it did last year.

Sure, the dystopian, conspiracy-laden setting is in place, and nano-tech augmentations and inventories packed with natty tools are easily accessible via the new HUD interface. But it wasn't really possible to get a sense of the open-ended design or branching narrative that will make or break the game. And though Eidos is boasting a deeper simulation than ever before, expanding the open-ended scope, this is something that certainly wasn't apparent given the brief demos at E3.

What was noticeable, worryingly, was that, on Xbox at least, the controls are flaccid and unresponsive, with a deficient auto-aim system that didn't quite work, while last year's crisp visuals have given way to a murkier graphical style. Neither is enough to seriously dampen **Edge**'s enthusiasm for what we still expect to be a stellar title, but these are troubling signs nonetheless.



Maybe it was because the appearance of the *Half-Life 2* demo was so impressive, but for some reason, *Deux Ex* failed to shine, visually, as much as it has in the past. Nevertheless, emergent gameplay was amply evident, and is, after all, the greatest strength of the original

Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness

Format: **PS2, PC**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Core Design**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **June 20**

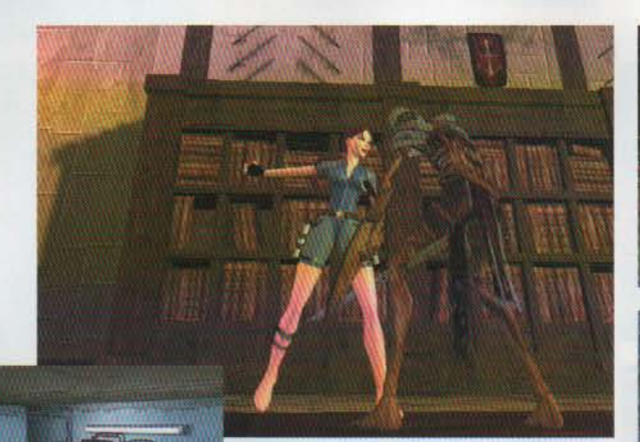
Previously in **E**110

Delays and sticky controls have so far plagued Core's multi-million pound banker. Has the Croft original finally run dry?

Has Lara had her day? Opinions seemed to be mixed at the show although it's fair to say that Eidos' stand was hardly under stampede. Queues were weak at the *Tomb Raider* pods and while the game was playing better than the ECTS build, the fervour was less pronounced. Unfortunately the delays haven't been too kind to the first next-gen *Tomb Raider* and while visually sound, the game's look has been surperseded by a number of other thirdperson action and adventure games on the format.

Significantly, the clumsy controls have been improved since **Edge** last got its hands on Lara, though things are still noticeably 'sticky'. The camera, too, is currently wayward – no doubt the reason why Eidos is still holding off on a release. These technical issues aside, its likely that *Angel of Darkness* will offer everything and more *Tomb Raider* fans are anticipating. The new stealth mode is a neat addition (pressing R2 puts Lara into a crouch) though again, is something that's now de rigueur in a thirdperson action title.

The much vaunted 'interactivity' between the heroine and NPCs is something that could assist in deepening the experience, though it's noticeable that the game's original brief has altered considerably over the last couple of years.



Tomb Raider's locales have been considerably modernised for this next-generation outing. The darker, techno-punk feel reflects the maturing of the *Tomb Raider* fan-base, though it's still very likely that we'll see both Lara and Kurtis (Core's new hero) raiding traditional archeological sites





They'll still be a few switches to push, of course. Edge just hopes that pushing blocks is in the past

Medal of Honor Rising Sun

Format: **PS2, GC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **In-house (LA Studio)**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Autumn**

EA's latest WWII-inspired MoH focuses on the Pacific conflict of 1941–1944 and offers one of the more atmospheric rides of E3

The E3 in-game sequence began with your character aboard one of the vessels at Pearl Harbour. Predictably you come under attack and must navigate your way to the deck through the ship's metal corridors, the screen shaking violently with each of the relentless explosions.

At one point you pick up a fire extinguisher to put out some flames blocking your path before an NPC snatches it away from your hands to carry on the job elsewhere. It's a mostly linear route and you eventually make it on deck. Here it's utter mayhem, the sky littered with Japanese squadrons and anti-aircraft detonations while everything around you appears to be blazing. Handily the guy at the nearby turret gun gets blasted which allows you to take over.

The rest of the demo sees our hero take down plane after plane from the deck, and then (after being projected into the sea and picked up by a passing crew) from the gun mounted on the rear of a small patrol ship.

Which essentially shows little in the way of varied gameplay, and certainly nothing of the new twoplayer cooperative mode. As with previous *MoH* games, many of the events appear prescripted and the action still seems a little 'clunky' but this is pre-alpha code after all. There's still time.

Okay, it all seemed a little too 'on rails' for **Edge**'s taste, which does little for replayability, but in terms of videogame experiences the first level promises to be one hell of a rollercoaster ride

Electronic Arts

Standing in the middle of EA's stand, watching the immaculately produced video reel detailing the company's immaculately organised structure was a memorable experience. Every single title is a carefully developed franchise, perfectly capable of reaching impressive sales figures. Thankfully, amidst the yearly sports updates and one or two dubious ventures, the company was showcasing some genuinely promising software. The last two years have seen a change in the company – one for the better – and this year's E3 is yet further proof.



The Sims 2

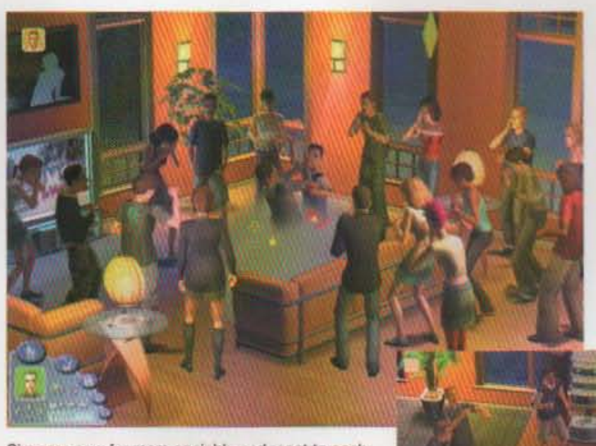
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **In-house (Maxis Studio)**
Origin: **US**
Release: **TBC**

Finally, after three years, six expansion packs, 17 different language translations and 24m units sold, the Sims franchise is ready for its first genuine sequel





The E3 demo included a hot-tub scene bordering on soft porn. There's humour, too – the girl got struck by lightning which soon killed the mood



Sims are now far more sociable and react to each other in a far more complex manner, establishing their personality in rather convincing fashion

The overall concept is that your Sims can now age, meaning players can now guide their characters through various generations and all of the life events that tend to punctuate contemporary western civilisation. As in the real world, choices made throughout their development ultimately affect their personality, thereby opening the possibilities for all types of fascinating sociological experiments. An element of genetics has also been added, with characteristics of parent Sims passed through to offspring.

Budding plastic surgeons will be delighted to learn that the developer is offering the ability to sculpt every aspect of a Sim's facial structure, to the point that, if you wanted to, you could make it look like you. Or a cute alien, as demonstrated by the Maxis representative taking **Edge** through the well-rehearsed E3 presentation. Which can lead to some interesting results once that DNA mixes with that of a human Sim as a result of marriage…

The Sims themselves benefit from improved behavioural fabric and can interact with each other and their surroundings in a more realistic manner due to enhanced AI routines and an increased animation repertoire. The environments have also been upgraded and are now fully three dimensional. So it's all looking good.

TLotR: The Return of the King

Format: PC, Xbox, PS2, GC
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: In-house (Redwood Shores Studio)
Origin: US
Release: Q4

Electronic Arts gives gamers the chance to stick Frodo's finger in the Crack of Doom

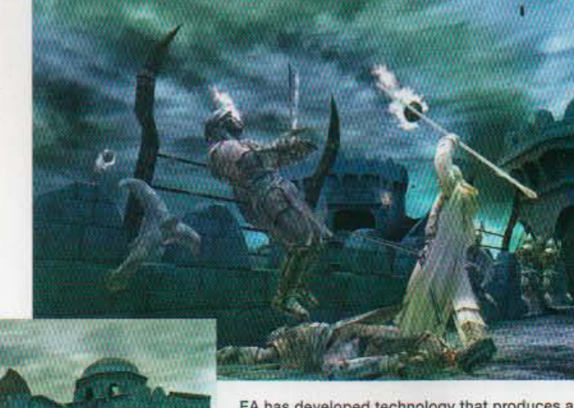




Players will meet a range of bosses, including Shelob, the Witch King and the Dark Lord himself, Sauron, and get to play as several characters

Unburdened by the weight of expectation, *The Two Towers* proved to be a pleasant surprise at last year's E3. What with the fact that the game turned out to be actually rather good, any sequel wasn't going to find it so easy to impress jaded journos. So it's no mean achievement that *The Return of the King* still impressed this year. Obviously the "seamless movie-to-game transitions" will be making a comeback, as will Howard Shore's musical score, but there are a number of new features that look set to maintain the freshness that characterised EA's first *Lord of the Rings* game.

Thus an expanded cast of playable characters includes Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, Sam and Frodo, and missions encompass the major set-pieces from the film, such as the defence of Minas Tirith, the Paths of the Dead and the encounter at the Crack of Doom. In addition, the new settings and characters are accompanied by various gameplay tweaks, such as interactive environments which allow characters to jump onto ropes and fire catapults, and a revised set of controls that add nuance by using the right analogue stick to perform multi-directional attacks. A twoplayer cooperative mode has also been added, and works well thanks to a camera that zooms in and out to capture all the action.



EA has developed technology that produces a shaky-cam effect, to heighten the visual impact of the siege warfare that concludes the film. The game featured some of the most atmospheric moments witnessed at this year's E3 show

James Bond: Everything or Nothing

Format: PS2, GameCube, Xbox
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: In-house
Origin: US
Release: Q4

After the last two Bond games EA has a lot to prove with its latest effort. Perhaps a change of perspective is required

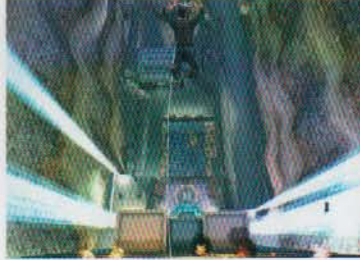
Another year another Bond game, which is a subtitle we gladly bequeath to EA for the future. After the average *Agent Under Fire* and *NightFire* comes a change of heart from the company. Apparently fans complained that the last two outings did not 'feel' Bond enough. *Everything or Nothing* has moved into thirdperson mode, offering a greater sense of character. Or that's the theory.

On the level **Edge** played, Bond attaches his grapple hook to the top of a factory roof and rappels downwards. The analogue stick controls decent and sideways movement can be used to avoid the flames bursting through windows. Enemies also launch themselves off the building in a similar fashion before the action swings to a traditional thirdperson mode on the ground. Firing and targeting are automatic (on the shoulder button) and the controls are simple and effective. Objects, such as spanners, can be picked up and used as weapons, which spices up the action a little.

Both Pierce Brosnan and the latest Bond girl, Shannon Elizabeth (of 'American Pie' fame), are giving their voices and likenesses to the game for additional authenticity. However, **Edge** suspects this is not going to help distinguish *Everything or Nothing* from the glut of thirdperson action titles already available on the market.



As in *Indiana Jones and The Emperor's Tomb*, Bond will be able to pick up objects around his environment and use them to club opponents





Locations will include the Valley of the Kings and New Orleans' French quarter. You can also expect to receive a number of gadgets from Q, of course

Castlevania: Lament of Innocence

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house (KCET)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November**

Konami would rather you forgot about earlier 3D Castlevania games. This, apparently, is where the series makes the definitive switch

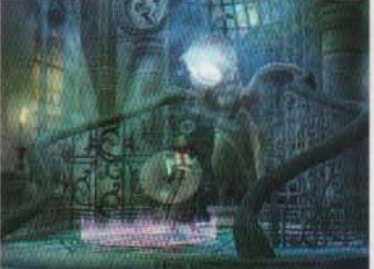
Lament of Innocence producer, **Koji Igarashi**, is a man of humble ambition. His modest goal is simply to have a copy of *Castlevania* in every single household. Hence his decision to switch to three dimensions for the first next-gen version of Konami's 16-year-old vampire action franchise. Because while the series so far has been resolutely 2D (with the exception of the inferior N64 titles that Igarashi-san would rather we all forgot about), he is convinced that 3D games are more popular with a general audience than their 2D brethren.

In spite of the move to 3D, though, die-hard fans ought to be assured by the fact that *Lament of Innocence* is being developed by the same team responsible for *Symphony of the Night* – which is universally acknowledged as the finest title in the series so far. It's being put together on the basis of a Konami in-house engine, and will also feature Pro Logic II decoding to immerse the player in an 11th-century ambience – complete with the background sounds of crickets and insects in the game's moonlit garden area, for example.

It fits into the series as a prequel, explaining the origins of the Belmont family, and casting players as Leon Belmont, the original vampire hunter. And in spite of some superficial similarity to *Devil May Cry*, this is a game that boasts a set of mechanics that remain remarkably faithful to its 2D forebears. As Igarashi-san describes it, "You can almost will your character around the stages."

Thus, as was evident from the playable level at E3, two buttons control Leon's whip attack, one quick and light, the other slow and damaging. Used in tandem they produce combos, or aerial combos while jumping. Then there are the five subweapons; Holy Water, Dagger, Cross, Axe and the newly introduced Crystal, which seems to act almost like a timed mine. Finally, there are seven orbs that can be combined with ten relics in order to create more powerful attacks and special moves.

Other details include an *Ico*-style camera, which is essentially fixed but movable to a degree, and the return of pattern-based boss battles. The only question that remains is how the exploratory element of the series will survive the transition to 3D. At the start of the game, players are given a choice of five doors, each leading into a different area of Dracula's castle. But it isn't clear whether progress will be level-based and linear, or across the sort of sprawling maps that have characterised the series so far.






There's an obvious similarity with Capcom's *Devil May Cry* Series, but *Lament of Innocence* also bears close comparisons to its 2D predecessors, featuring a very familiar control scheme and a similar set of subweapons and whip upgrades



From now on, Konami intends to restrict 2D versions of *Castlevania* titles to platforms such as the GBA, so any home console sequels to *Lament of Innocence* will be developed in three dimensions

Konami

Even though *Metal Gear Solid 3* was overshadowed by both *Halo 2* and *Half-Life 2* it was a strong showing for Konami. *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence* was tremendously popular while updates of other old favourites, including *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Gradius V* and the company's annual updates of the *Dance Dance Revolution* franchise, kept the stand very busy. Although there was certainly nothing revolutionary, Konami proved that its IP was as strong as ever.

Boktai

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: TBC

Kojima-san finds inspiration from another movie as coffin-dragging Django is unleashed on the world



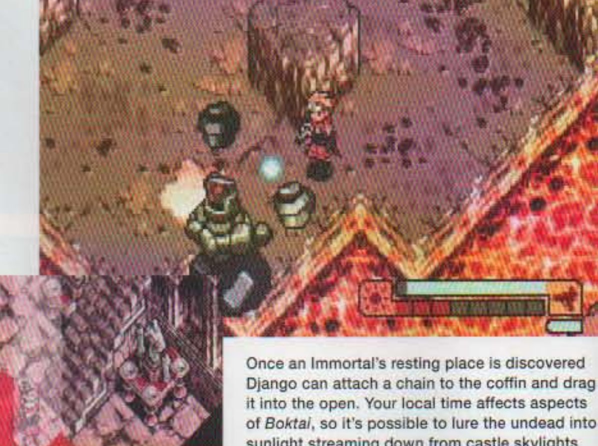


A novel idea, certainly, and with plenty of charm but only more play will determine whether it ends up becoming the world's most impractical game

It's either a dazzlingly ingenious idea, or one of the most impractical games ever conceived. **Edge** has played a preview build of the game and believes *Boktai* is somewhere between the two. Kojima-san's intentions are noble: it seems that Japanese parents have often complained that videogames keep their children cooped up indoors, so in response he's built a game that necessarily requires them to get out a bit more.

The downside to all this is that strong sunlight is vital for making any kind of progress in the game. There's a caveat in that sunlight can be stored up in generators spread throughout the game, though boss encounters must be fought while Sol is out and unobscured by cloud cover. Hero Django's quest itself seems pretty simple. Immortals lay in coffins in a series of castles and dungeons and he must drag them out into the open before he can banish them. The twist is that the hero's weapon, the Gun del Sol, can be boosted with a number of enhancements that can take care of the many undead minions encountered on the way.

In fact, the gameplay is not a million miles away from the original *MGS* and it's even possible to distract creatures by knocking on walls. **Edge** only hopes that the review copy arrives before Wimbledon starts.



Once an Immortal's resting place is discovered Django can attach a chain to the coffin and drag it into the open. Your local time affects aspects of *Boktai*, so it's possible to lure the undead into sunlight streaming down from castle skylights only if the sun is shining brightly in the real world

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: 2004

An impressive trailer, no doubt, but will Konami listen to gamers who found the lengthy cinematics of MGS2 alienating?

"Is this a Grand Theft Auto?" asks a nonchalant soldier as Snake threatens to steal his motorcycle. How we laughed. While Shigeru Miyamoto continues to ignore the work of rival companies, Hideo Kojima shows us just how media savvy he is. It's clear that Konami's maestro still knows how to push all the right buttons, and while the trailer showed very little in the way of actual gameplay, footage of Snake eating raw flesh and dangling from trees was enough to have his audience salivating.

Clearly the emphasis is now firmly on jungle survival and warfare, though the game will still include secret bases to infiltrate. Kojima-san revealed that the engine had been re-written to incorporate undulating surfaces and new moves for Snake, presumably ones that allow him to better navigate this more complex organic universe. Neat touches were also evident: Snake was seen shooting a beehive above the heads of two guards to with predictable results, but everything was hinted at rather than revealed.

Edge hopes that Kojima-san focuses on gameplay rather than lengthy cinematics for this enticing sequel, but at the moment more in-game footage is required before a more comprehensive assessment can be made.



Snake can use different camouflage to blend into his surroundings and he must hunt the local wildlife to survive. Apparently, he will acquire tastes for certain prey over the course of the game, though only snakes and fish were seen in the demo. Hunting dogs also hunt the hero down





MGS3 is set in the Cold War scenario of the '60s and, some of you will be pleased to read, is a Codec-free zone. Expect more coverage soon

Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic

Format: **Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **BioWare**
Origin: **Canada**
Release: **Summer**

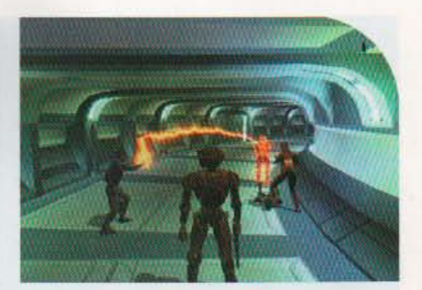
Previously in **E**109, **E**112

It's like a Star Wars Baldur's Gate, in 3D – which is about the highest praise anyone can give a thirdperson action RPG





The pause-time combat will be familiar to anyone who's played any of BioWare's *Baldur's Gate* titles





Knights of the Old Republic* is one of those games that didn't entirely benefit from the unnaturally abbreviated attention spans of E3 attendees. Although it was much more polished and immediately accessible than the build that was on display last year, the game still seemed to confuse some showgoers who were lured in by its lustrous thirdperson visuals but left bewildered by a strategic combat system and complex quest structure. Not **Edge**, though, for whom the game was among the most exciting prospects at the show – largely because it plays pretty much like a *Baldur's Gate* title, set in a 3D depiction of the 'Star Wars' universe.

Thus, to judge by demonstrations, an epic central narrative is gradually explored through cinematic cut-scenes and a series of smaller subquests, and supplemented with optional goals and distractions. Obviously one of the (many) strengths of the *Baldur's Gate* series was the colourful cast of NPCs, a feature that's made the transition to the 'Star Wars' universe thanks to nine NPCs who can be recruited to your party over the course of the game. Only three party members can adventure together at once but it's possible to switch between NPCs back at your ship, the Ebon Hawk.

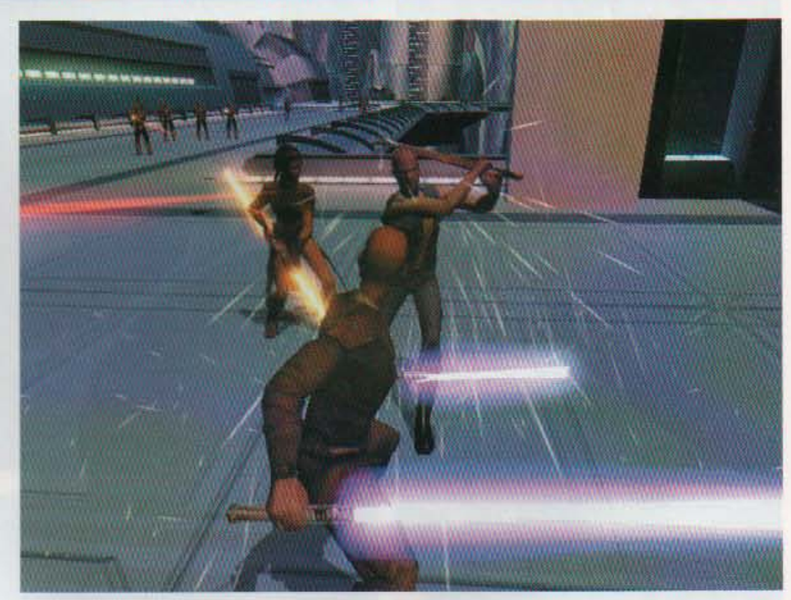


Edge is increasingly confident that BioWare will bring an end to the recent list of mediocre 'Star Wars' titles from LucasArts. *KotOR* looks great

There are also shades of *Baldur's Gate* when it comes to combat, since the game features the same pausable realtime strategy approach, albeit in 3D and with an interface that's optimised for the Xbox pad. So while commands can be issued to party members on the fly through a series of simple menus, it's equally possible to leave the AI to look after itself, or to pause the action to deliver a more considered set of instructions.

And, of course, like *Baldur's Gate*, the game is based on the 'Wizards of the Coast' d20 rule system, a fact that was evident during demonstrations of the character creation process – as was BioWare's determination to target both hardcore RPG gamers as well as more casual console owners. Thus it's possible to quickly create a new character by following a default quickstart system or taking more time to tailor your character's stats.

Other neat things revealed at the show included the way in which certain in-game decisions precipitate your character's conversion from Dark to Light (or vice versa), a transition that triggers a change in appearance. And there's the fact that early parts of the game will see your character building their own lightsaber, with the ability to upgrade it over the rest of the game. It's the sort of minutiae that has lent BioWare's previous titles such an enduring shelf-life.



Over the course of the game, players are able to collect components with which to upgrade their lightsaber – or tailor them against specific enemies, to be more effective against droids, for example

LucasArts

Like last year, a big screen situated in the West Lobby provided an almost permanently rapt audience with constantly rolling footage of forthcoming LucasArts titles. A short walk away, and by appointment only, the company was showing playable versions of most of the titles, confirming the impression of an extremely promising line-up for a company that has failed to make an impact in recent years. A solid selection of *Star Wars* titles was supplemented with several enticing new franchises, such as *Armed & Dangerous*, and remakes or updates of various franchises from the company's illustrious history.

Format: **Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **Planet Moon Studios**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Winter**

Armed & Dangerous

LucasArts returns to quirky comedy with explosive action and tea-sipping androids



Press releases aren't renowned for their honesty or accuracy, but the official LucasArts description of *Armed & Dangerous* as an "over-the-top thirdperson action shooter" is probably as appropriate a summary as any that **Edge** can come up with. Thanks to the rather distinctive design philosophy of Planet Moon Studios, the game marks a return to the quirky territory occupied by older LucasArts graphic adventures that the publisher has neglected lately.

Perhaps this is best illustrated by one of the cut-scenes which was on display at the show. In a playful homage to a scene from 'The Empire Strikes Back' ("And I thought these things smelt bad… on the *outside*!") a tea-sipping robot advises his compatriots to place an injured colleague up the anus of a beast of burden, in order to keep him alive – with rather predictable, and fairly amusing, results.

Which is a fairly apposite indication of the tone of the game: With the emphasis placed firmly on overstated explosions and its tongue firmly in its cheek, *Armed & Dangerous* aims to entertain and amuse, with few pretensions. Perhaps that's why it kept attendees spellbound with its character-rich sense of play.

Although only one character – Roman, a cockney criminal mastermind – is playable, his firepower is supplemented by the skills of three sidekicks: a Scottish Mole named Jonesy, the team's demolition expert; Q1-11 the aforementioned upper class, debonair eliminator droid; and Rexus, a once great sage reduced to an unpleasant shadow of his former self. With these four engaged in a daring heist, the action plays out across 21 missions in all, but the conventional thirdperson action is punctuated by interludes such as a knowing pastiche of *Beach Head* in which players must defend a fortress wall from an epic army of angry barbarians.

Perhaps the game's biggest selling point is probably its arsenal of outlandish weaponry. The Cyclops Sniper Rifle adds a twist to conventional long-range weaponry by producing bullets that don't stop. So a well or accidentally placed shot is capable of taking out several opponents. The Vindaloo Rocket Launcher, meanwhile, fires four missiles simultaneously, and a Sticky Bomb does exactly as its name suggests.

The game's crowning glory, though, is the Topsy-Turvy Bomb, which turns the world upside down, sending enemies hurtling downwards/upwards into the sky, only for them to fall back to the ground when it rights itself. Like the rest of the game, it's played for laughs, but it also betrays more design ingenuity than a lot of its po-faced peers at the show.







The Xbox version of *Armed & Dangerous* will benefit from downloadable content over Live. Hopefully this content will demonstrate as much ingenuity as the main game, which shares the same quirky outlook as Planet Moon's earlier squad-based action title, *Giants*







Secret Weapons over Normandy

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **Totally Games**
Origin: **US**
Release: **November**

The creator of X-Wing and Tie-Fighter turns his hand to World War II to create a historical-based dog-fighting sim



Edge isn't a big fan of historically authentic combat flight sims. But the involvement of the mind behind *Tie Fighter* and *X-Wing* has excited our interest. Platform-specific content will allow PS2 and Xbox owners to play through in a cooperative multiplayer mode, while PC owners will be able to design their own missions. There will also be downloadable content over Xbox Live

World War II was all the rage at this year's E3; it was almost impossible to move on the show floor without bumping into yet another historically authentic FPS. LucasArts' historical flight combat sim, though, was less prominent, if only because the company was showing its wares by appointment only.

As the successor to the *Secret Weapons* series of World War II flight sims, *Secret Weapons over Normandy* boasts over 30 missions, set in 15 different combat theatres, featuring more than 20 historically authentic aircraft (including little-known experimental craft, such as the XF5U 'Flying Pancake').

More importantly, the game also boasts the design skills of Lawrence Holland – the designer behind those delightfully weighted learning curves of the *X-Wing* and *Tie-Fighter* titles. Holland intends to bring a similarly smooth sense of progress to *Secret Weapons over Normandy*.

And on top of this story-driven advance, *Secret Weapons* boasts several features to punctuate the flow, such as remote-controlled rockets, or missions that cast the player as a gunner rather than a pilot. It's also possible to slow down time during the game, to reflect the surge of adrenaline engendered by dog-fighting.



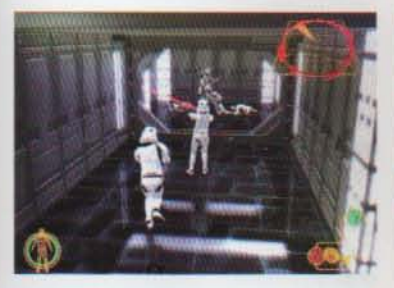


In-game sound has been derived directly from field recordings of actual WWII-era aircraft, thanks to the archives of Skywalker Sound

Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **Factor 5**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Winter**

Factor 5 throws in a bit of thirdperson action to supplement the vehicle-based combat and cinematic visuals





Non-vehicle combat doesn't appear to have been handled especially well, but *Rebel Strike* looks like capturing the essence of the films anyway



Players are able to adopt the role of Wedge Antilles, Luke Skywalker or Han Solo, getting to pilot X-Wings, B-Wings speeder bikes, AT-STs, and, perhaps slightly bizarrely, tauntauns

As you'd expect from the successor to *Rogue Leader*, *Rebel Strike* was one of the better-looking games at E3. From Endor to Hoth to Bespin, this is a game that strives and succeeds in capturing the visual grandeur of its source material. And though it doesn't look like remedying the restrictive level design that has characterised the series, that is unlikely to bother the legions of gamers for whom an authentic 'Star Wars' experience is more important.

"More than 13 action-packed missions," reads the press release (which presumably means 14, but could equally mean 15, or even 16!). But more important than the number of missions; for the first time in the series, *Rebel Strike* allows characters to leave their vehicles. So one mission, for example, sees an aerial mission above Yavin 4 segue into ground battles with Imperial Stormtroopers before the action moves back to the skies. In truth this isn't an addition that **Edge** welcomes; satisfying thirdperson combat has eluded LucasArts in a variety of titles, and *Rebel Strike* doesn't currently look like it's going to change things.

A more welcome addition is a variety of multiplayer modes, both head to head, and a cooperative mode, consisting of the same missions as *Rogue Leader*, but playable by two individuals.

Halo 2

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios**
Developer: **Bungie**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Spring 2004**

Previously in **E115**

First in-game demo of the sequel to the wonderful, wonderful Halo goes down rather well at E3. Well, what did you expect?





There have been significant graphical improvements and Bungie's E3 'demo' only hinted at what the developer is toying with for this sequel in terms of new gameplay additions. It'll be special, obviously







Microsoft

A strong and very busy stand indeed, though no doubt due in part to its claustrophobic layout, Microsoft saw the majority of the visitors queueing for their chance to enter the *Halo 2* demo auditorium. Rare's titles also proved very popular with the US crowd and despite some games fighting the PC corner, as in the last two years the company's stand was primarily devoted to Xbox.

We're in East Africa, in New Mombasa. Master Chief is flying in via dropship and approaches the biggest sprawling megalopolis videogaming has ever seen, with a central section seemingly reaching into the heavens. Stepping out of the back he's immediately met by a number of ground forces. The significant enhancements in facial detail and animation are clearly evident as one of the soldiers barks out a report on the situation they're facing. Obviously it's bad. Obviously there's Covenant around. That's why the Chief's here.

So it's straight into the action. Surrounded by human resistance forces displaying convincing combat behaviour, Chief begins by sniping from an elevated position. Down below, amidst overturned or abandoned civilian vehicles (which explode when fired upon), an impressive number of grunts are already battling with some familiar Covenant types. It's hectic stuff, with gunfire, shouting and radio transmissions evoking the atmosphere of a battlefield in a more forceful manner than the game's predecessor.

A few well-placed shots later, Master Chief grabs two machine guns handed over by a soldier (you can hold different types of weapon for obvious strategic play, with the L shoulder button taking care of the left-hand duties) and ventures down to street level. More carnage ensues before jumping on the back of a Warthog and firing off the new high-powered gun turret at Covenant ships while an NPC does a decent job of negotiating New Mombasa's rumble-filled avenues.

Then it's on foot again as a set of better-armoured enemies turn up. They take a few hits but are eventually dispatched only for a squadron of Ghosts to zero in on our hero. He dodges the first, then leaps onto the second, taking over control duties mid-flight.

The demo ends with Master Chief on one of the city's freeways, surrounded by a number of pods that have just crash landed around him. Predictably these open, each revealing a Covenant badass. Then it's fade to black…

The demo went down a storm at E3, and **Edge** would agree it's all highly impressive. It's an evolution on *Halo*, sure, and not as revolutionary as *Half-Life 2* but as just one of the levels of the final game (Bungie didn't want to waste time preparing an E3-specific demo and so used a genuine in-game section) it's only a taste of what the final game will be. Be very excited.

Grabbed by the Ghoulies

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft Game studios**
Developer: **In-house (Rare)**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4 2003**

Rare continues its trend for toilet humour in naming its haunted house brawler, but it feels fairly confused



Expected to be the first Rare game out for Xbox, **Edge** would question whether the game's (presumed) target demographic currently exists. Xbox owners are still very different beasts to those that made up the majority of N64's sales. Then again, a broad catalogue is crucial for Xbox

Like all of the Rare titles that were on conspicuous display at Microsoft's stand, *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* didn't immediately impress. But it's still difficult to tell whether this was due to the fact that the constraints of the show didn't allow the strength of the game's mechanics to shine through or, more worryingly, whether the game is simply too inconsequential. For while the game undoubtedly boasted the developer's customary polish in terms of presentation and characterisation, it managed to come across as both laborious and lightweight. The tutorial, for example, took far too long to get going.

When it did, it was enjoyable enough. Set in Ghoulhaven Hall, the game places its protagonist at the mercy of various nasties, including vampires, zombies, mummies and skeletons. Using weapons, fisticuffs and a variety of environmental objects (such as chairs and billiard cues) players must defend themselves while causing as much damage to the mansion as possible. And it's all perfectly entertaining, if slightly trite.

Perhaps it's for kids, but Rare seems to be aiming the title at a Nintendo-style 'all-ages' audience. Judging by what was on offer, the game is characterised by the sort of simplicity and accessibility that such titles require; it's just that this didn't seem to be matched by any concomitant depth.





The control scheme, which sees your character attack mapped to an analogue stick isn't entirely novel. But it does work well and is fairly intuitive

Fable

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios**
Developer: **Big Blue Box**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **TBC**

Edge wasn't meant to see Fable at E3. But a sequence of events involving a German TV documentary crew, a US Web journalist and some last-minute planning... it's a long story





We look forward to seeing what Big Blue Box can come up with. Certainly the E3 demo would indicate that development is coming along fine



You can be heroic and spend your time slaying nasty beings. Or you could just get villagers to believe that you spend your time slaying nasty beings. **Edge** knows which it would rather be

It is a long story and not one **Edge** is prepared to go into now – suffice to say we made it backstage and Big Blue Box's Carter brothers were talking excitedly about their story. And with reason. Still wonderfully ambitious, *Fable* has come a long way.

The 'be a hero' summation of the marketing drive is misleading. In *Fable*, being perceived as a hero by the NPC crowd is as effective as being genuinely heroic, though obviously a far safer option. Villagers can be dazzled by your swordplay as much as your magic skills and so building a modest following is a straightforward undertaking.

Clearly, a game of this scope will live or die by the quality of its AI. Currently things appear promising, with characters able to learn actions as well as react convincingly to situations. Start a bar brawl and you can step outside to admire your work, safe in the knowledge that the dispute will rage on. Or return home after months on the road to a nagging wife (though **Edge** suspects the Carter's insistence on chatting up a girl within eyesight of the marital home may have contributed to the situation).

If the above examples seem trivial, you've missed the point. They're an indication that *Fable*'s world convinces in its ability to draw the player into a fantasy universe. An essential aspect for a game of this type.

I-Ninja

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Namco
Developer: Argonaut Games
Origin: UK
Release: TBC

New IP, fresh ideas and a cheering level of character. The future looks bright for Namco's latest mascot








I-Ninja is already proving to be a versatile chap. Along with sword attacks he'll be able to grind rails, perform a helicopter fall and shoot enemies with a blowpipe



One excellent part of *I-Ninja* that **Edge** witnessed was the hero's ability to climb inside balls and race them around rollercoaster-style constructions. We're not sure how this fits into the plot but it's great fun

How do you get consumers interested in one of the oldest genres in the industry? The platform game has evolved massively over the years, but now there's a feeling that it's reached an impasse. Even Naughty Dog (see p50) seems to be incapable of teaching the industry new tricks. In the absence of any genuinely fresh ideas, others have turned to the notion of fusion for inspiration. If *GTAIII* can successfully bolt together two styles of game then surely the humble platformer can follow suit?

It's a theme we've already seen explored in games such as *Haven: Call of the King*, but where *I-Ninja* differs is in its insistence on cannibalising the best elements from platform games rather than bolting on a host of poorly developed adventure or car-chase sections. Along with platform jumping I-Ninja can chain swing, swim, grind and wall run.

I-Ninja has immediate visual appeal. When other developers are upping the polygon count on their characters and coming up with failures like *Vexx* and *Blinx*, Namco's latest mascot is refreshingly minimalist. The game's appeal lays in the simplicity of expression – anger, pain and pleasure are all brilliantly exaggerated. Against a host of derivative product *I-Ninja* stands out, both visually and in terms of its sheer ebullience.

The hero is particularly fleet of foot and it's a joy just to navigate the intricate arenas. Along with his basic skills I-Ninja can also perform a momentum run to navigate particularly treacherous obstacles and can 'sword-copter' down from high ledges. I-Ninja's sword will take down enemies but he can also throw shuriken and use a blowpipe that can be turned into a rocket-launcher once it's armed with high-explosive darts.

The title is also refreshing in its ability to poke fun at itself. The ludicrous plot is delivered in hammy overtones and there are several digs at typical videogame cliché – something of a self-defence mechanism, you might say. After being killed in a clumsy accident, I-Ninja's master returns in spirit form to guide his arrogant and wayward pupil.

While only five levels exist, *I-Ninja* is more about exploration and achieving perfect scores in all the sub-sections and minigames. As a flavour of the game's quests, on one level the hero must assemble a giant mech warrior, which he can then pilot in a mad punchout minigame, a gameplay device lifted from Konami's cult *Goemon* series. Indeed, while it may be UK-developed, *I-Ninja* is quite Japanese in appearance and outlook.

Namco

Namco will be hoping that the lack of turn-based RPGs on GameCube will benefit its forthcoming *Tales of Symphonia*, though it was hardly drawing in the crowds. Of more interest was a rolling demo of *R: Racing Evolution* and a number of demo pods offering *Soul Calibur II* in playable form. Indeed, apart from *I-Ninja* and its fabulous beat 'em up, Namco's stand was weak.

Mario Kart: Double Dash!!

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4 2003**

One of Nintendo's most cherished brands returns, but can all the changes possibly satisfy younger fans and purists alike?

There are few videogames that can validate your hardcore credentials more than *Super Mario Kart*. Talk lovingly about powersliding around Donut Plains and you can hold your head up high at any geekmeet the world over. Which is why any new addition to the franchise is going to be met with nervous excitement.

The first screens of *Double Dash* released prior to E3 were unconvincing. Square trees and karts looking like elaborate perambulators did not inspire confidence. Let's ease your fears now: *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* is shot through with typical Nintendo brilliance. While only three tracks were available to play at the show (Luigi Grand Prix, DK Mountain and Mushroom City), the game is already looking like it could be as much fun as the multiplayer component of *Mario Kart 64*.

Nintendo's concentration on showcasing the multiplayer aspects of the game (complete with eightplayer LAN functionality via the GameCube's broadband adaptor) might be cause for concern to purists, and there's been little indication of how the singleplayer game will shape up. It's interesting to note, however, that the handling model is more akin to the drift nature of *Super Mario Kart* rather than *Mario Kart 64*'s hop, slide and boost.

Obviously, the most significant change to the formula is that each player must now select two characters to man a vehicle. Players' choices are inputted on a selection screen simultaneously and the free-for-all fun this generates even before the race has begun is striking. Considerable depth is added because each character can hold an item collected after racing through rotating item cubes. Strategically swapping characters (by pressing the Z button) is vital as each can obtain a special weapon available only to them. Deciding whether to hold on to the more basic weapons, ditch them for the chance of a better pick-up or switch to an itemless character will often be the difference between a quick lap time and a red shell up the tailpipe. Switching to an itemless character at the right moment is also beneficial because they can snatch weapons held by rival karters.

The racing is actually not as fast and frenzied as you'd expect, with the emphasis on good kart control and shrewd interchange of your riders. Of course, balance is everything and while *Double Dash!!* is currently good knockabout fun, it's too early to tell if it can eclipse the magnificence of the first outing.















Though not obvious in the E3 build, Nintendo wants players to be able to avoid red shells by performing a drift 'dodge', and also recover from banana slides with an expertly timed brake manoeuvre



Characters are no longer consigned to their own vehicles and can jump into those of rivals – with a few exceptions. Baby Mario, for instance, is too small for Donkey Kong's wooden chug-a-bug and vice versa

Nintendo

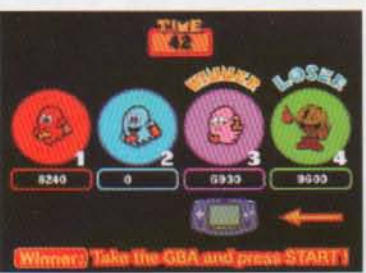
Nintendo's stand was notable for its disappointing lack of new IP, but that's not to say the stand itself was lacklustre. *F-Zero GX* and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* were among the most popular playable games at the show, if queues were anything to go by. Connectivity was clearly the theme and along with the Carrera Virtual Racing slotcar system (powered via GBA SP) there were plenty of multiplayer opportunities for attendees, including the novel GC *Pac-Man* and *The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords*. *Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour*, *Wario World* and *Star Wars Rebel Strike: Rogue Squadron III* were all enjoyable if unexpectedly so. *1080° Avalanche* was disappointingly banal. Nintendo definitely didn't steal the show.

Pac-Man

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendc
Developer: In-house/Namcc
Origin: Japar
Release: TBC

Nintendo reworks an old game and makes it new. You'd think the company has had some experience in this area





The game keeps track of who's got the GBA and lets players know who it should go to next. It's a little fiddly if Wavebirds aren't being used though

One of the more interesting prospects to be found on Nintendo's stand this year, Pac-Man made yet another appearance though a cleverly reworked one.

Pac-Man diehards may choke at the notion of a fourplayer version of their baby, but in practice things work rather well. The player controlling the yellow protagonist does so by using a GBA as their joypad while the handheld's screen displays the familiar game map. The other three players assume the role of a ghost each (sorry, there's only enough pad ports left for three) but have limited visibility and must share the main TV screen to monitor their progress.

Once Pac-Man is caught, controllers are swapped around and so on until the eventual winner is declared. Fear not, the GameCube keeps track of the pads' movements and displays clear instructions on screen. Granted, it's something of a fiddly process but one that provides genuine entertainment despite the clumsiness of its execution. Certainly, as one head of a major UK developer pointed out excitedly to **Edge** at the show, the game is likely to provide immense non-threatening, family-friendly fun. And in an industry seemingly obsessed with WWII-themed FPSs this year, that's something of a refreshing change.



As one of the ghosts you get limited vision (otherwise it would make things a little too hard for poor old Pac-Man). It's a neat reworking of an already sublime videogame classic

The Legend of Zelda: Tetra's Trackers

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: TBC

Nintendo clearly doesn't hate piracy that much, as the first ever Wind Waker spin-off is revealed at E3

It was the one game that Shigeru Miyamoto suggested **Edge** play above all others. *Tetra's Trackers* was something of a surprise at the show but amply demonstrated Nintendo's E3 connectivity theme. Clearly based on the latest *Legend of Zelda* title, *Tetra's Trackers* drew in the crowds and was just as popular as *Four Swords*, demonstrated on the next stand.

The idea is very simple: four pirate swabbies (or differently coloured Links) get to compete for pirate treasure around several islands. Quick reflexes, a powerful memory and luck all play a part in your success. Pirates must be found in numerical order – to prove to Tetra that your tracking skills are up to scratch and occasionally they'll demand a small number of rupees before they hand over a stamp proving you found them.

Additional items spice up the already frantic gameplay. Pegasus Boots, an invisibility cape, a bow and arrow, a magic hammer and Tetra's Miracle Stone can give you an advantage over your three rivals. Use the Miracle stone, for instance, and Tetra will reveal the location of the next pirate or directly lead you to the nearest treasure chest. *Tetra's Trackers* is a lot of fun initially but **Edge** doubts whether it can sustain interest over long periods of time.



Four GBAs must be attached to the GameCube before play commences. The handhelds then operate as controllers, though you'll have to change between looking at the GBA screen and TV to follow the action. Scores and prizes are awarded at the end of each island rummage





While **Edge** applauds the move towards connectivity, we wonder if enough thirdparties will support Nintendo in this bold venture

Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Sonic Team**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4**

Trust Sonic Team to come up with one of the most queer and dynamic games at a show that had few genuine surprises

It was a sad sign of the times to see Sega's stand at E3 so desolate. Although hardcore fans were always in attendance, it just wasn't as vibrant as in the days of yore. There were one or two old favourites, but the stand was largely saved by the excellent *Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg*.

It's only 30 per cent complete but the levels **Edge** experienced were delightful. A good game character has always been something that's easy to spot but difficult to create. In Billy – essentially a small boy in a rooster suit – Sonic Team has created a hero that oozes appeal. The simple kinetic pleasures of rolling eggs around is further enhanced by superfast on-rails sections reminiscent of *Sonic Adventure*. Although they start out small, the eggs increase in size after being fed protein bubbles (left by defeated enemies). It is also possible to bounce on eggs to reach higher platforms.

Then there's the fun of hatching the creatures you've been guiding – almost a minigame in itself. Over 30 magical creatures can be hatched and further Chao-style breeding is promised. *Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg* might never quite match *Sonic The Hedgehog* in the popularity stakes, but it was certainly one of the most effervescent titles at this year's E3.

Once a number of creatures have hatched Billy can use them to overcome obstacles – rivers, for instance, can be frozen by certain creatures. There's some strategical depth as only one creature can be guided around the level at a time

Sega

A presence not as significant as in recent years, Sega's stand nevertheless attracted a healthy number of visitors. Yuji Naka was around (Edge kept seeing him hanging around with Amusement Vision's Nagoshi-san at every evening event) to talk about his latest creation which had the biggest demo pod allowance. Further along, past the *Altered Beast* video demo, *Phantasy Star Online Episode III* battled with *Headhunter Redemption*, a host of *Sonic* titles and latest signing *Warhammer Online*, of course. All in all, a strong showing.



Worms 3D

Format: **PC, PS2, GC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Team 17**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4**

It's Worms. In three dimensions. What more do you need to know?





Up to four players can compete on a single machine, though PC gamers will also be able to take on opponents over the Internet or via LAN



True to the traditions of the series so far, battle maps will be generated randomly before each contest, though the PC version will ship with a level editor to enable homebrew enthusiasts to get their hands dirty with a bit of level design

It was slightly tucked away in a corner at the Sega stand, but *Worms 3D* was far from out of place. After all, with its simple but quirky ruleset and vivid cartoony aesthetic, *Worms* is a series that shares a lot in common with Sega's development philosophy – even more so now that it's fully resplendent in 3D. Indeed in the leap to three dimensions, Team 17 doesn't appear to have diminished the elementary nature of the game at all. Thus, the rather simple premise of every *Worms* game remains intact; turn-based strategy, starring teams of worms fighting head to head in environments that disintegrate with hyperbolic and comic effect.

Of course the new 3D environments necessitate a choice of camera angles, ranging from firstworm perspective to a blimp view, and Team 17 also reckons it's managed to improve the singleplayer experience by the addition of unlockable challenges and improved AI.

Otherwise, this is pretty much the same game as its predecessors – only this time it's in 3D. And on reflection, that's probably a good thing in the case of *Worms*. So it's still possible to tunnel around the environment, or perform combos by toppling other weapons onto opposing worms, and the bizarre choice of weaponry remains intact.

Jak II: Renegade

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **Naughty Dog**
Origin: **US**
Release: **November (US), December (UK)**

Previously in **E**123

Jak's back and, rather predictably, he's darker and meaner than ever before











There are worrying signs that Naughty Dog's shift towards *GTA*'s gun-based open-endedness has diluted the platforming purity of the original *Jak & Daxter*. In keeping with the more morbid tone of the game, collecting Dark Eco now enables Jak to turn all superpowered for a brief amount of time





There wasn't a great deal wrong with the original *Jak & Daxter*. Sure, it was pretty brief, and the enjoyment offered by the latter half of the game was diminished by an obstreperous camera, but its platforming principles were implemented with panache and polish, and there were no areas that were obviously in need of sprucing up for a sequel. Perhaps its only real problem was that it failed to sell as many copies as Sony and Naughty Dog expected it to. *Jak II*, then, is presumably a bid to attract a generation of gamers whose tastes are now more *GTA* than *Crash Bandicoot*.

Certainly that's the impression generated by the E3 demo, which showed off one of the game's early levels, consisting of a dark urban setting that had more in common with Rockstar's city sim than Naughty Dog's marsupial hero. Thus Jak is now able to accost passers-by and steal vehicles, while pursuing various missions for a variety of NPCs. More significantly, he now has guns.

Over the course of the game, Jak acquires four weapons, along with a hoverboard, two new facets that fundamentally reconfigure the game away from pure platforming and towards combat action. But **Edge** can't help feeling that this is a change too far for a series that wasn't in need of substantial restructuring. Judging from a two-level playable demo that was given away at the show, it now seems to fall, like *Ratchet & Clank* before it, between two stools. The inclusion of both platforming and combat elements seems to curtail each of them – and that's without considering Jak's sluggish movement throughout the demo, or a camera that's comparably stubborn to the one featured in the original *Jak & Daxter* (indeed, it will be interesting to see how it'll cope with the new demands of the uneasy hybrid this game is shaping up to be).

Obviously there's still time to fix these features, and to correct a targeting system that suffers from lack of feedback. And given the developer's track record this is a game that is still one to watch.

But of course there's no guarantee whatsoever that the addition of darker themes will consequently attract a more substantial audience. Indeed the slightly disappointing commercial performance of *Jak & Daxter* probably owed more to the lifecycle of Sony's console than it did changing audience tastes. To the *GTA* generation, Jak will probably remain too bright and breezy a character.

Sony Computer Entertainment

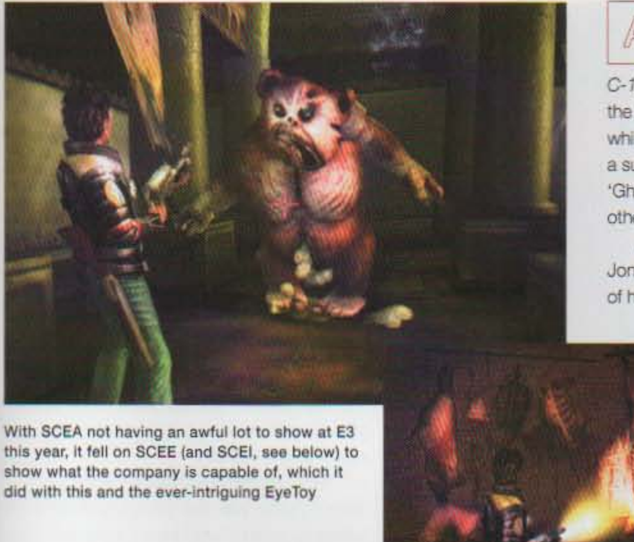
Perhaps because it organised its floorspace more (or less) efficiently, Sony's stand seemed much less crowded than Microsoft's bustling booth. And there were undeniably one or two duds on display, such as the Jet Li vehicle, *Rise to Honor*, and a rather rough-looking *Tomb Raider*. Nevertheless, there was a lot of quality on display, and, significantly, variety: Sony's offered a gaming spectrum that ranged from EyeToy to the latest *Gran Turismo*, and a substantial online offering. So while there were no surprises, it was another solid showing of the company's leadership credentials.

Ghost Hunter

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **In-house (Cambridge Studio)**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Winter**

Previously in **E**124

"'Ghostbusters' with guns" is the appealing tag for this already impressive-looking Sony title



With SCEA not having an awful lot to show at E3 this year, it fell on SCEE (and SCEI, see below) to show what the company is capable of, which it did with this and the ever-intriguing EyeToy

At the risk of sounding defensive, **Edge** readers will be pleased to know that despite the Cambridge Studio pedigree of *Ghost Hunter*, its development team cut its teeth on *MediEvil 2* and *C-12*, rather than *Primal*. Not that there's no crosspollination between the games; both share a certain amount of game code for example. But while *Primal* lost its way in the midst of a cooperative buddy system and a subgoth fantasy world, *Ghost Hunter* is much more straightforward. 'Ghostbusters' with guns is the obvious starting point, while plenty of other film references from 'Deliverance' to 'The Rock' inspire the levels.

A thirdperson action game, players take on the role of Lazarus Jones, a rookie Detroit cop who is inadvertently caught up in the release of hundreds of ghosts throughout the US. Tracking them down is made easier by an array of gadgets, including capture grenades, a filter-attached torch, IR goggles as well as more traditional weaponry.

Visually, the game looks stunning. Perhaps that's expected of a firstparty Sony game, but *Ghost Hunter* is impressive in other ways too. Control is smooth, with neat contextual actions, such as hiding and popping up from behind crates and miscellaneous environment debris. Expect to hear a lot more about it, particularly as the Sony hype machine gears up.





Not unexpected for a firstparty Sony product true, but *Ghost Hunter*'s visuals rarely fail to impress. Thankfully, there are plenty of good ideas, too

Gran Turismo 4

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **Polyphony Digital**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Christmas**

Polyphony slides the key into the ignition of the latest iteration of the real driving simulator and gives it half a turn...





The new Logitech wheel is special, offering twice the level of force feedback, a 900-degree turning circle and a dedicated side-mounted gearstick



To test the accuracy of the new driving model, Polyphony lapped the Tsukuba circuit in a Honda S2000 in both the game and real-life situations. The lap time difference was 0.4 of a second... The E3 sixplayer network version suffered from a minor bug but expect this to be sorted out

It's Wednesday May 14, the first day of the show and **Edge**'s first appointment is with Polyphony president Kazunori Yamauchi. He begins by saying that *GT4* has been harder to develop than the previous game, simply because *GT3* pushes the PS2 pretty close to its technical limits but revised development procedures have made certain graphical enhancements possible.

Cosmetics aside, more than 500 cars are expected (standard, street mods, convertibles, racing and historically significant), circuits are longer and feature more world locations (the E3 demo has New York, the Grand Canyon and Tsukuba) as well as an increased number of licensed race tracks.

The physical model has undergone major reworking and the team now claims that it's as close to real life as the series has ever been and has the statistics to prove it. Using Logitech's new Driving Force Pro (see caption) designed in conjunction with Polyphony the developer reckons you can use the game as a practice aid for circuit driving – from what **Edge** experienced at E3 there's little reason for doubt. The AI, on the other hand, remains unconvincing, though work on this area is underway.

Another evolution then. There's still no sign of damage though...

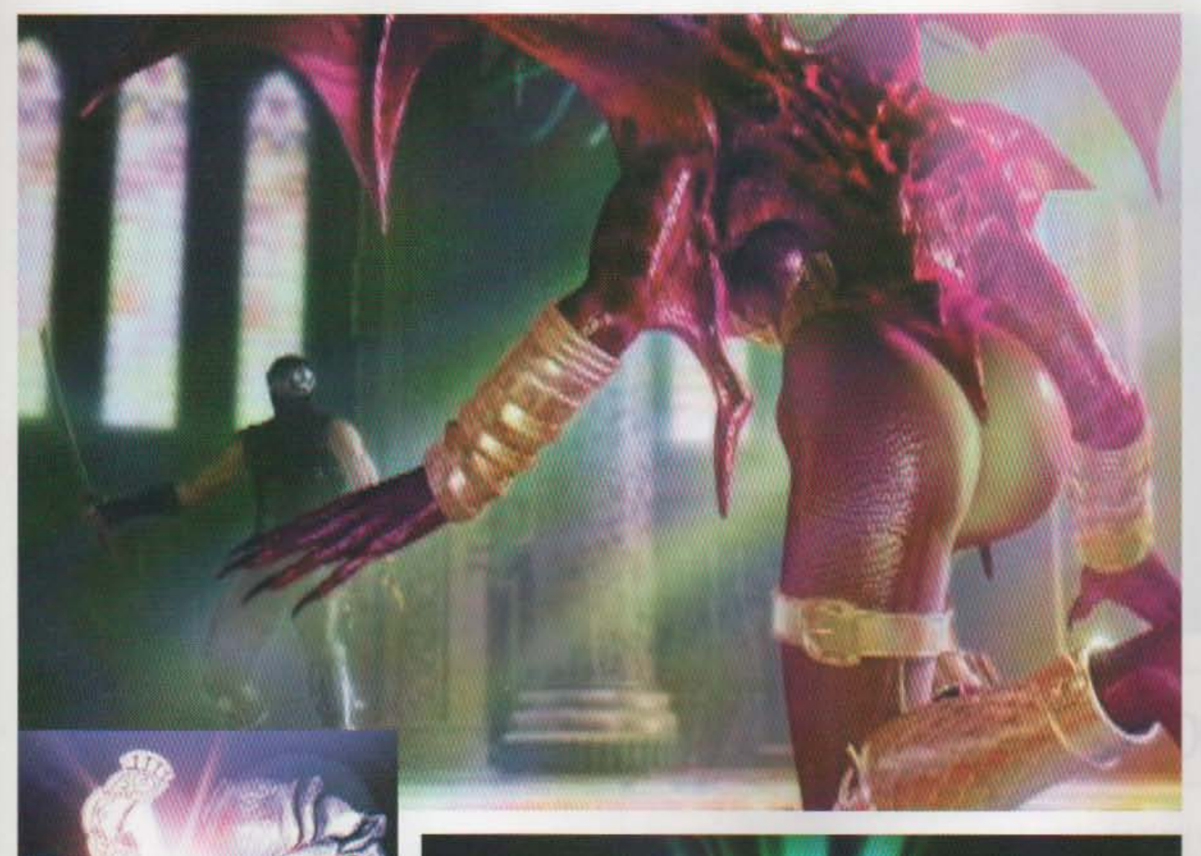


Ninja Gaiden

Format: Xbo
Publisher: Tecm
Developer: In-house (Team Ninja
Origin: Japar
Release: Christmas

Previously in E112, E11

Team Ninja's development sensei turned up at Microsoft's stand to show off the latest playable build of Ryu's adventures



Ninja Gaiden was looking good at E3, but not quite this good – though these renders and cut-scene stills give a reasonable impression of what to expect, aesthetically, from an extremely promising title



The silver prototype Xbox made an appearance in the E3 demo, which showed the need to use the full range of Ryu's moves to negotiate complex areas

Tecmo

As ever, the Tecmo booth attracted huge crowds with its prominent booth-babe displays, which consisted of a variety of skinny models decked out in strange wigs and bikinis in a bid to reflect the super-idealised physiques of the *Dead or Alive* girls. Aside from providing attendees with the opportunity for a photo (with a girl!), there were videos of *Ninja Gaiden*, *Fatal Frame 2* (*Project Zero 2*), and *Dead or Alive Online*, an Xbox Live-enabled compilation of the first two games in the series.

As the game's creator, Tomonobu Itagaki, has been keen to stress, *Ninja Gaiden* is a game that's been designed with western audiences in mind from the outset of its development. So the enthusiastic response to the game at E3 must have given him some cause for confidence. Although it wasn't playable at the show, big screen trailers at both the Microsoft and Tecmo stands were eagerly lapped up by the US crowds, and Itagaki-san himself drew significant crowds when he gave a personal demonstration at the Xbox stand. Following on from its 8bit progenitors, the game focuses on Ryu Hayabusa as he seeks revenge after the massacre of his family at the hands of the Vigor Empire and attempts to reclaim the magic sword Ryuken.

The most obvious thing about the E3 demonstration was that this is a game that will inevitably cement Team Ninja's reputation as a developer that's capable of achieving the very finest visual output. And not just in terms of the game's aesthetic and textural detail, but also in terms of animation and control: judging by the E3 performance and **Edge**'s own pre-show play, this is a game in which it's remarkably easy to look remarkably cool.

Controls are relatively straightforward, consisting of a separate button for walking on the wall, one to jump, and one to attack, and a series of context-driven actions. Meanwhile, a gauge charges up to allow powerful ninjutsu moves to be performed, while Itagaki-san's demonstration attested to the easy transition between thirdperson and firstperson camera – a view more appropriate to sniping with projectile weapons such as a bow and arrow (although Itagaki-san didn't distinguish himself as a marksman, even with a limited auto-aim).

Over the course of the game, power-ups increase the potency of your sword and award new missile weapons, and depending on certain decisions new combos and skills become accessible, with which supernatural fiends can be taken out with increasing ease.

Finally, Tecmo announced that the game will be compatible with Xbox Live, though details as to precisely how weren't clear at the show. The exact wording of the announcement didn't give any clues either: "Tecmo's Team Ninja development group has created a revolutionary new Xbox Live-compatible feature within *Ninja Gaiden*. This radical new feature is being developed specifically for *Ninja Gaiden* and is like nothing any gamer has experienced in an action game before it." Whatever that means.

Full Spectrum Warrior

Format: **PS2, GameCube, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Pandemic**
Origin: **US**
Release: **TBC**

The war against terror is in safe hands as THQ backs a combat simulation capable of training US troops away from the battlefield



While members of your squad can currently be relied upon to behave intelligently, the behaviour of the opposition you face still needs work. But other than that this was one of E3's more convincing examples of counter-terrorist warfare

The number of wargames at this year's E3, not to mention the strident manner in which they were being promoted, was perhaps the event's least appealing aspect. In fairness, all the games had clearly been in development a long time before the term 'shock and awe' had been conceived. *Full Spectrum Warrior* is set in a middle-eastern location that 'might' be altered in the future.

In terms of mechanics *Full Spectrum Warrior* is quite unusual. Rather than controlling individuals in firstperson perspective, the player has direct command over two squads. Think *Commandos* in full 3D. The game is being developed as a combat simulator for US troops and Pandemic promises an unparalleled level of realism. Whether it can be shaped up into a fun and satisfying videogame is another matter.

Tactical consideration is clearly the emphasis and each squad, or individual member, can be commanded through the D-pad to take up positions in the environment.

It's clear from the level **Edge** has played that this is no vanity project sold on the back of its simulation pretensions. When gunshots ring out the tension is palpable. Your squads can act independently and generally do so with intelligence. The terrorists, however, fail to show much in the way of survival instinct. This is being worked on.

THQ

It was something of a mixed bag from THQ at E3. On the one hand showgoers were treated to the potentially excellent *Full Spectrum Warrior*, *Fire Warrior* and *Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon*. On the other, games such as *Sphinx*, *Finding Nemo* and *SpongeBob SquarePants Operation: Krabby Patty*, though clearly aimed at the younger market, watered things down somewhat. On a plus point, THQ had easily the best fruit smoothies at the event.



S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Oblivion Lost

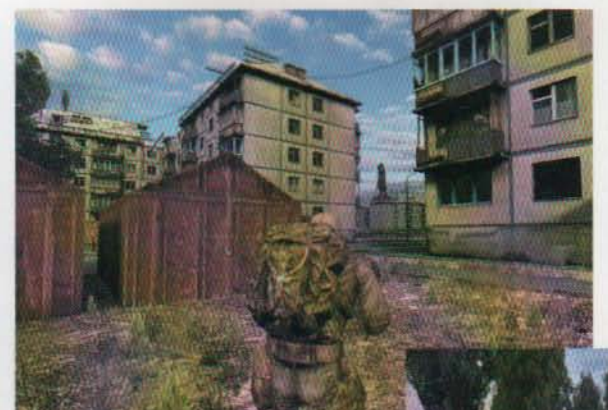
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **GSC Game World**
Origin: **Ukraine**
Release: **Q4**

Out of the ashes of Chernobyl comes a horror game with invisible enemies and telepathic dwarves. Look but don't touch





A large part of the game's appeal will be in beating your Stalker rivals to significant artifacts and unwitting them through clever trading



There's 30km to explore and, as in *Metroid Prime*, certain areas only become accessible once certain special items are discovered by the player

Among all the next-gen(eric) ware at E3 was one title that stood out, if only for its deranged premise. Set in the Chernobyl area in the year 2006 (four years after a second catastrophe) *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* is a firstperson shoot 'em up that promises as much NPC interaction and exploration as gunplay. Your main objective is to enter and search the derelict region for important scientific discoveries and artifacts. Two other 'Stalkers' will be attempting to beat you to the finds.

GSC promises that the plot will unfold differently for each player. Interacting with certain NPCs, for example, will trigger different events and certain characters will 'remember' your actions. Kill significant NPCs and you will be branded for the rest of the game. In truth, not much of this was on display while **Edge** was demoed the game, but the hope of further RPG elements, such as trading and possibly befriending the other Stalkers in the game, is intriguing.

Visually the game is excellent and the developer has certainly managed to inject the game with a suitably melancholic atmosphere. The creatures were still under wraps – though GSC promises telepathic dwarves – so it's just too early to tell if *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* can rise above most PC survival horror cliché.

The Matrix Online

Format: PC
Publisher: Warner Bros Studios/Ubi Soft
Developer: Monolith Productions/EON Entertainment
Origin: US
Release: 2004

Ubi Soft secures the licence that could be the One for the massively competitive MMRPG market

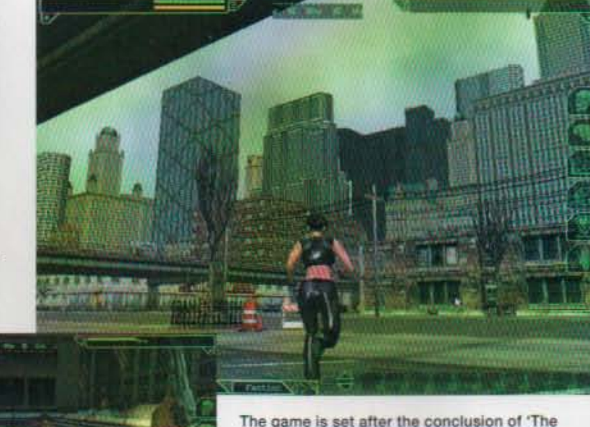
Ubi Soft
Although it wasn't necessarily in possession of the loudest or most obvious stand, Ubi Soft's E3 offering was a strong one. For a start, there was the expected proliferation of Tom Clancy titles, and also a couple of solid but unremarkable film tie-ins, like *Charlie's Angels* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. And then there was a selection of titles that each hold out significant promise, such as *Beyond Good & Evil*, *Far Cry*, *XIII* and the two games **Edge** looks at on this page.



Ubi Soft was showing off little more than a tech demo behind closed doors, but the announcement that it had signed up the Wachowskis' money-spinning film licence for its next MMRPG was big news on the monitor out front. And though there wasn't much given away about what mechanics will be used to shoehorn the 'Matrix' universe into a massively multiplayer environment, there was still a significant amount of promise on display, and, significantly, a demonstrable affinity for the source material.

For a start, the conceit that players are actually logging into the Matrix every time they connect to play is an interesting one, but then there's also the implementation of bullet-time. Thanks to the exertions of the Babel party the night before, **Edge** still can't quite grasp the mechanics of how this works in a massively multiplayer environment, but what Ubi Soft seemed to be saying is that, after slowing down, the last increments of bullet-time are in fact speeded up to make sure that every player is kept on the same timeline.

As with *Enter the Matrix*, the creation of all of the new content for the game will be supervised by the Wachowski brothers. Although after *Enter the Matrix*, **Edge** isn't sure whether that's necessarily a good thing or not.



The game is set after the conclusion of 'The Matrix Revolutions' and takes place in a sprawling cityscape complete with functioning interiors. Character models are breathtakingly stylish – and detailed – and players will be able to influence an overarching narrative via episodic updates and a dynamic mission system

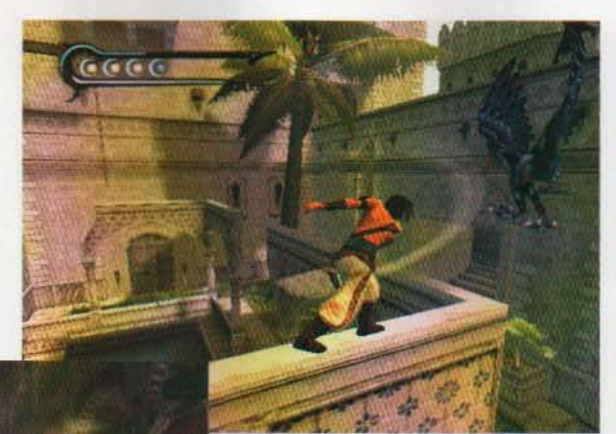
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Format: PC, Xbox, PS2, GC
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: In-house (Ubi Soft Montreal)
Origin: Canada
Release: November 2004

Edge experiences a little bit of déjà vu as Ubi Soft dusts off another classic gaming franchise, throwing in some Blinx-style time manipulation for good measure

The Sands of Time won't be the first 3D version of *Prince of Persia*. But unlike the unofficial series of sequels starring Lara Croft, the prince doesn't exactly have an illustrious track record in three dimensions. No doubt Ubi Soft is hoping that the involvement of the original game's creator, Jordan Mechner, as a creative consultant will elevate this latest Arabian adventure above the execrable standard set by its immediate predecessor. Certainly the signs from E3 augur well for a title that looks more likely to capture the essence of the original.

Mechner is keen to emphasise the character progression and narrative, and over the course of the game the prince's character model will change to reflect his journey to maturity. Returning to the roots of the series, character animation is smooth and graceful, and the sense of control over a wide range of acrobatic manoeuvres – including running along walls – is intuitive. An interesting addition is a range of *Blinx*-style time-manipulation controls, facilitated by the eponymous Sands of Time. Thus, a rewind function allows the designers to include the sort of sudden-death dynamic that was perpetuated by the original, without it feeling too punitive for today's low-frustration-threshold gamers.



The Sands of Time follows the quest of the titular young prince, unwittingly duped into unleashing the forces of evil, attempting to atone for his mistake by ridding his father's lands of evil





Well-animated, acrobatic action will go some way to capturing the essence of the original *Prince*, but there are plenty of additional features

Half-Life 2

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Valve**
Origin: **US**
Release: **September 30**

Previously in **E**124

Following last issue's expose, E3 offered another opportunity to witness the second coming of Gordon Freeman

Were **Edge** forced to make sense of E3 by identifying a single game as the game of the show there's no doubt which title it would be. And though it was only viewable via a carefully managed and oversubscribed presentation, *Half-Life 2* beat everything else at the show into a cocked hat – even *Halo 2*. Heck, even the tech demo at the start of the presentation packed in more originality than a lot of the games to be found elsewhere at the show; and not just due to coding trickery, but because of the imagination with which the potential of the Source engine was shown off.

Consequently, the cinema booth on the ATI stand was surrounded by queues around the clock, in spite of the fact that most of the presentations were by appointment only. Once inside, the demonstration kicked off with a close-up of some breathtakingly detailed character models. There followed a brief but entertaining demonstration of the Havok-based physics engine, ranging from oil drum pachinko to characters made out of water and a series of windows made of various materials.

The neatest trick arrived when a CCTV camera was shot off its tripod, its output accurately mapped on a bank of monitors before, using a grav-gun, the camera was hurled into the bank, smashing the central monitor, leaving the others and their accurately mapped camera output unaffected. But although the emphasis was definitely on the engine's technical bells and whistles, Valve's Gabe Newell stressed that improved character models and animation or accurate physics are simply tools to facilitate an emotionally resonant interaction with the game's narrative, achieved by placing players in a consistent game universe.

Thus the in-game demo featured Coke cans spilling out of a vending machine, and a swiftly jury-rigged furniture blockade, before some well placed grenades toppled a huge container on top of some oblivious enemies, and an accurately aimed shot freed several planks from their moorings to wreak a similar amount of mayhem. Later sections suggested that the weapon selection might be limited, a la *Halo*, and depicted several interesting weapons, ranging from a relatively mundane homing missile launcher to an exotic pheromone grenade that allowed the player to direct the aggression of alien hordes.

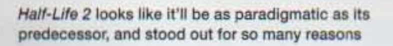
Then there was just the small matter of showing that the engine is equally adept at portraying vehicle-based combat in open terrain as it is at representing squad-based combat in a confined urban setting, complete with AI-controlled allies and, eventually, those gargantuan Striders. So, in short? The game of the show.











Half-Life 2 looks like it'll be as paradigmatic as its predecessor, and stood out for so many reasons



Perhaps the most impressive thing about the *Half-Life 2* demo, apart from its slick presentation, is that it's for a game due to be released in September. It's nearly time to invest in a few PC upgrades then

Vivendi Universal

A troubled financial situation didn't stop Vivendi from producing one of the noisiest stands at E3 this year. Blizzard's *Warcraft III* and *Starcraft Ghost* looked like bolstering the popular brand, while *Hulk* was generating interest suggesting that it could do well on the back of the licence alone. Under a big tent was the cacophonous *Men of Valor: Vietnam* while *Dredd Vs Death* was being previewed to select press upstairs. (Edge will provide a fuller report on Rebellion's '2000AD' title in the near future). *Half-Life 2* was clearly Vivendi's feather in the cap, but was being demoed some distance away in the most 'fashionable' room at E3.

SWAT: Global Strike Team

Format: **Xbox, PS2**
Publisher: **Vivendi Universal**
Developer: **Argonaut Games**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4**

Can voice recognition finally come of age? SWAT will hopefully pave the way ahead for such technology





One trick is the ability to drill holes in walls before pushing through fibre-optic cameras. A clever way of gathering intelligence in hostage situations

Proving that there's more to Argonaut than *Malice* is *SWAT*, a title that had little presence at E3 (one pod) but proved to be one of the most interesting tactical ops games at the show. It manages to trump other similar titles due to its clever voice-recognition system. Using the headset supplied with Xbox Live (or *SOCOM* for PS2 users) the player can hold down the left trigger (or shoulder button) and issue spoken commands to team-mates.

More than just a gimmick, the system – which can break down phrases phonetically – has a significant impact on gameplay. Orders include 'cover', 'open door', 'fall in', 'enter and clear', 'silent fire' and 'breach door'. It's possible to order a team-mate to 'target' an enemy, for instance, though if you feel you have better line of fire, you can shout 'get down' to give you the decisive head shot. Argonaut is also including sonic effects such as ringing in the ears when a flashbang grenade goes off nearby.

Also impressive is a visual effect that sees your character's eyes adjusting to the level of light in rooms, mimicking the human iris. Featuring over 20 singleplayer missions and ten dedicated missions for cooperative and fourplayer deathmatch modes, *SWAT: Global Strike Team* is a game that should definitely be on your radar.



Expect gadgets galore, including the now familiar thermal imagers, proximity mines and computer hacking equipment. Obviously *SOCOM* also features voice communication though it's not as advanced a system as *SWAT*'s

Men of Valor: Vietnam

Format: **PC, Xbox, PS2**
Publisher: **Vivendi Universal**
Developer: **2015**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

Another heavily scripted FPS, but does the foliage of Vietnam hide something more spectacular. Probably not

Although a sweaty tent full of journalists and sandbags may not have been the most pleasant atmosphere to experience a demo it certainly sets the scene for one of the noisiest games of the show. *Men of Valor: Vietnam* is being developed by 2015, the team responsible for *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. Unexpectedly, then, the game's strength lays in its authentic recreation of the sights and sounds of the Vietnam war. Atmosphere is everything.

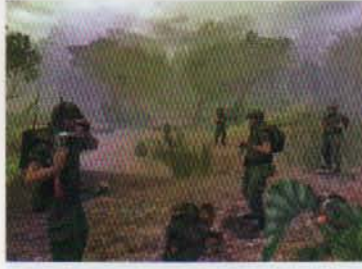
Like *Medal of Honor Rising Sun* the game is very much on rails. Beginning in the back of a Huey, it's not long before explosions ring out and you see the mini-gunner fall in a bloody heap. The player can then take command of this weapon to take down as many Vietcong ground troops as possible before the gunship takes a fatal hit from an RPG. The rest of the demo is what you'd expect: advancement over jungle terrain, dispatching Vietcong camped down in bunkers and sniping enemies hiding in foliage.

Men of Valor is brilliantly evocative for those raised on 'Platoon' and 'Apocalypse Now' ('Wooly Bully' plays as your Huey swoops over north Vietnam) but, from present evidence, the lack of any real autonomy beyond narrow tree-lined corridors and scripted events shows a lack of genuine innovation and ambition.



2015 promises that 'cultural' factors will underpin and deepen the gameplay. Along with music and slang from the period the issue of racism in the ranks will be tackled, though there was little evidence of this from the build Edge saw





The success of *Medal of Honor Frontline* has led to a crazy number of war games. Will consumers be able to stomach so many real world conflicts?

E3 Prescreen Alphas

Announcements and updates from the show...

Gladiator Sword of Vengeance

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **In-house**



Acclaim's Roman brawler looked reasonable enough, but it's far too late to benefit from the shortlived interest in 'Gladiator' the film, and the company had little else of interest on show

Call of Duty

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Infinity Ward**



The team developing *Call of Duty* is drawn largely from the development team responsible for *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* and it shows. It's largely the same game, but slightly different

Doom III

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **id**



The impressive trailer suggests that id's latest hype-driven venture is *Doom* but with superior graphics. And as far as **Edge** is concerned that is not something to be entirely ashamed of

Rome Total War

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Creative Assembly**



No rumours about Robin Williams this year, but *Rome Total War* is looking like eclipsing the previous games in the series and establishing Ancient Rome as the definitive combat arena

Trinity

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Gray Matter**



The latest FPS from the chaps who revised *Wolfenstein* is a rather post-'Matrix' cyber-enhanced slo-mo affair, though it was rather outdone by the likes of *Halo 2* and *Half-Life 2*

X-Men: Legends

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Raven Software**



Mission-based RPGs aren't exactly what Raven's renowned for, but the squad-based approach will probably work well with Marvel's bunch of mutant misfits, of whom 15 feature

Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **Floodgate**



Developed by ex-Looking Glass employees, the singleplayer *Undrentide* campaign was looking entertaining enough at E3 – not to mention all the extra content for would-be DMs like **Edge**

Group S Challenge

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 3)**



Handling felt overly heavy but powerslides were reasonably controllable. Still, with *Sega GT* and *Project Gotham* already on the Xbox you have to wonder if there's any room for yet another racer

Maximo vs Army of Zin

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 8)**



Maximo returns to face a clockwork army of souls of the undead. NPCs can be saved and reward you with new abilities, more moves, 50 per cent bigger and wider selection of boxers

MegaMan X7

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 3)**



X7 introduces Axl, a new character who can impersonate enemies. MegaMan and Zero also feature in this 2D/3D game. Choose two heroes and swap between them to reach new areas

Onimusha 3

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 2)**



Over 20 enemies often appear onscreen simultaneously and though it's not yet finalised, Capcom expects to be able to use the actual voices of the game's two main protagonists

Onimusha Blade Warriors

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 2)**



Remember *Gauntlet*? Well, this is nothing like it. But it does offer weapon-based fourplayer action on a single screen. A decent franchise spin-off though longevity could be an issue

Resident Evil 4

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 1)**



Shown at the Nintendo press conference (see p6), this appears to be a darker, more disturbing departure for the series, with some menacing ghost-like fiends as well as more usual aspects

Steel Battalion Online

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**



It's *Tekki*, but played with real-life humans courtesy of Xbox Live. Which will hopefully alleviate the over reliance on scripted events in the first *Steel Battalion* – to judge from E3

Viewtiful Joe

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**

Viewtiful Joe appeared undiminished from his latest bouts in Japanese wrestling rings, and though his game didn't win universal acclaim at the show, it's still one of **Edge**'s favourites

Breed

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **CDV**
Developer: **Brat Designs**



A glorious effort from a small team, no doubt, but *Breed*'s delays have done it no favours in terms of comparison to other similar titles. Very engaging but it's unlikely to be a *Halo*-killer

Battlefield Command

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **1C**



Subtitled *Europe at War 1939–45*, this is one finely detailed WWII RTS, making it one of the best looking examples **Edge** has come across. And it should be one of the more playable, too

Colin McRae Rally 04

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **In-house**



Revised physics, an interesting structure (which includes minigames) and more cars should just about be enough to let the publisher get away with another yearly McRae update. Just...

Operation Flashpoint

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Bohemia Interactive**



Apparently, the guy hogging the demo pod while **Edge** waited to try out this seemingly faithful conversion of the first-rate war sim FPS was NSYNC's Lance Bass. He wasn't very good

Pop Idol

Format: **PS2, PC**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Hothouse Creations**



The appearance of American Idol judges Randy Jackson and Paula Abdul caused mayhem at Codemasters' stand but the game appears to have enough charm to attract gamers by itself

The Italian Job

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Climax**



Based on the soon-to-be-released cinematic remake, the game features the new Mini Cooper and while it promises to be fun, the handling dynamic could perhaps do with a bit more work

Legacy of Kain: Defiance

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**



One of the most effective camera systems at the show, the focus has been to concentrate on the action with positive results. Whether the game will convince many players is another matter

Freedom: Soldiers of Liberty

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **Io Interactive**



Another title on the EA stand that impressed with polished production values and a great sense of atmosphere, this was one of the better thirdperson urban warfare games at the show

Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC, PC**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **In-house**



It's certainly a neat idea, and an interesting way of utilising the Harry Potter licence, but it wasn't clear from the show how successfully a literary flight of fancy will be turned into a videogame

Need for Speed Underground

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **In-house (EA Black Box)**



Featuring one of the most astounding speed effects **Edge** has seen, the *NfS* series has finally let go of automotive exotica and is now down with the kidz and their hot mods. Very promising

Gradius V

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **Treasure**



Easily one of the games of the show, *Gradius V* was not only looking tasty but delivered the kind of gameplay we've come to expect from a Treasure shoot 'em up. Be very excited

Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **In-house**



Bad-ass Ben is back, but this thirdperson action/adventure hybrid did little to inspire confidence at the show. It all just looked a little rough around the edges, and fairly generic

SSX3

Format: **PS2, GC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **In-house**



An entire mountain range has been mapped to combat linearity, dynamic weather is included to make things more interesting, and the game features an absorbing, well reasoned structure

Karaoke Revolution

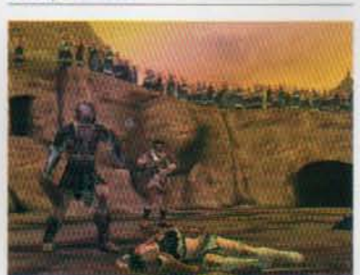
Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **Harmonix**



A clever system that recognises your pitch and adjusts accordingly. Many licensed tracks are promised but whatever the case this should surely help **Edge** win prizes at the local tavern

Gladius

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **In-house**



This turn-based combat RPG failed to impress for the second year running – not for want of good ideas, but for the failure of those ideas to really gel. There's still time to get it right though

CY Girls

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house**



Only a rolling demo on offer at E3, but *Cy Girls*, developed using the *MGS2* engine, is shaping up to offer a heady mix of gunplay, acrobatics and sass. **Edge** is tremendously optimistic

McFarlane's Evil Prophecy

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house**



Yet another comic-book inspired title at E3 – this one boosted by the aesthetic input of Todd McFarlane. The non-linear structure is welcome, but in truth, it's looking a bit generic and stodgy

Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Academy

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **Raven Software**



It didn't look like fixing every fault with *Jedi Knight II*, but *Jedi Academy* was impressive, largely because it offers hope of a much less prescriptive and a more polished experience

Firefighter FD18

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house**



Konami reckons that the conflagrations in *Firefighter FD18* have been modelled on the real thing. Although only a demo has been made available, **Edge** looks forward to tackling this

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house**



The turtles may have lost some street cred over the last few years but this 3D fourplayer update looks like it has perfectly captured the essence of both the cartoon and the 2D iterations

Wrath Unleashed

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **The Collective**



Wrath's intriguing premise, of combining a *Catan*-style turn-based strategy with a 3D beat 'em up will probably fail due to the inadequacy of the latter part, but this is an excellent idea

SpyHunter 2

Format: PS2, GC, Xbox
Publisher: Midway
Developer: In-house



Sequel to lacklustre update of 8bit favourite now offers snow and off-road vehicle transformations as well as new weapons and enemies. Mind you, the show demo didn't look that inspiring though

The Suffering

Format: PS2, GC, Xbox
Publisher: Midway
Developer: In-house



Nine levels set in a maximum security prison and a main character that transforms into a monster. **Edge** isn't entirely convinced whether there's a game underneath the excessive gore

Breakdown

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house



Still an intriguing prospect, Namco's FPS attempts to allow players to interact with their environment as they would in real life: punch and kick enemies, fire weapons, drive vehicles...

Extreme Force

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house (Hometek)



Thirdperson weapon-based combat, though not necessarily the way it should be. Little in terms of innovation, a convoluted control system and some of the stupidest enemies at the show

Kill.Switch

Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house (Hometek)



Another urban thirdperson combat affair, though one of the more promising examples, with good animation, seemingly decent enemy AI, detailed environments and rather atmospheric action

R: Racing Evolution

Format: TBC
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house



Shown in video-only, **Edge** spied the Monaco track, an oval and rally options. Visuals seem sub-*GT4* but the game is smooth, promises a story-driven Career mode and is due this winter

Spawn (working title)

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house



Although it might eradicate the memory of the ill-fated Dreamcast incarnation of Todd McFarlane's demonic anti-hero, this is pretty generic as thirdperson action titles go

Amped 2

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: In-house



One of the better examples of snowboarding at the show (thankfully there were few this year), this featured a host of new detailed touches and play options to improve an already excellent title

Conker: Live & Uncut

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Rare



Conker's multiplayer deathmatch was highlighted at the Xbox stand, but this will also feature a remake of the ill-fated N64 title. It's not entirely clear how it has been optimised though

Counter-Strike

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Ritual Entertainment/Valve Software



Counter-Strike. On the Xbox. That's all there is to say really. Apart from the fact that it supports voice communication. Which probably won't prevent **Edge** from being a bit rubbish at it

Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: In-house



Fairly intense dogfighting action with a very obvious (and welcome) arcade focus but **Edge** is particularly interested in the game's Live component which should elevate it significantly

Halo PC

Format: PC
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Gearbox



While the singleplayer version of *Halo* was every bit as good as the original, **Edge** was more taken by the new PC multiplayer games. Just imagine: 16 players, Banshees and new maps

Kameo

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Rare



Visually arresting, if a little too saccharine, *Kameo* looked like delivering an adventure of *Star Fox* proportions. However, the pressures of E3 left little time to plumb its possible depths

Project Gotham Racing 2

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Bizarre Creations



An expected evolution of the original Xbox racing experience was available to play in linked-up form, and showed no signs of the jerkiness evident in *GT4*'s network option

Sudeki

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Climax



The characterisation is clearly aimed at the US and Microsoft's big RPG hope was pulling in the punters. *Sudeki* is looking polished and deep, but a wayward camera still needs some work

Voodoo Vince

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Beep Industries



Difficult to tell from the limited time **Edge** was able to spend with this platformer but it did bring back memories of *Blinx*. And that isn't necessarily a good thing. Another look beckons

1080° Avalanche

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house



Oh dear. Framerate trouble isn't the most worrying aspect of the sequel to one of the best snowboarding games. No, that'll be the handling dynamic, which feels stifled and unintuitive

F-Zero GX

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house/Amusement Vision



One of the fastest and smoothest rides at the show, **Edge** greatly enjoyed its encounter with the new *F-Zero* update, particularly when using Logitech's new GameCube-specific wheel

Geist

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: n-Space



An exclusive GC title, this interesting FPS allows you to possess other characters in the game, essentially taking over their skills. A fourplayer option is also offered. Expect more on this soon

Kirby Air Ride

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house



Unsurprisingly for a game that started life on the N64, this didn't exactly look like it was pushing the GameCube very far technically, but it was probably more entertaining than *Mario Kart*

TLoZ: Four Swords

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house



A fusion of big screen action and covert GBA activity (when entering buildings or caves) this GC version of *Four Swords* has great depth and proved to be an E3 multiplayer favourite

Mario Golf Toadstool Tour

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Camelot



Judging by the fun factor the all new *Mario Golf* was one of **Edge**'s games of the show. The holes are all brilliantly OTT and GBA link-up play is promised. Likely to surpass even the original

Mario and Luigi

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house



Perhaps inspired by **Edge**'s 100th edition cover, Mario and Luigi are mostly inseparable in this delightful blend of exploration and puzzle solving. *Head over Heels* for a new generation

Metroid: Zero Mission

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house



Only a looping video on show, but **Edge** suspects this is a remake of the original NES version with adjustments to areas, bosses and weapons. Strange that it was so hidden away...

MGS: The Twin Snakes

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: KCEJ/Silicon Knights



Fans of Japanese shlock-horror director, Ryukei Kitamura, will be delighted that he's helping produce the cinematics for this remake. Expect new enemies, new features and plenty of gore

Seven Samurai 20XX

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sammy
Developer: Dimps



This was a promising sci-fi interpretation of the Kurosawa classic, endorsed by his son and featuring the design of French comic book legend Moebius. Expect more next issue

Sonic Heroes

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team



The major innovation in *Sonic Heroes* is a team-based element, allowing players to switch between three characters at will, but this also manically outpaces previous *Sonic* titles

Pikmin 2

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house



A much larger adventure this time and without the annoying time restrictions of the original. Olimar is joined on his quest by a new 'friend' which opens up a twoplayer cooperative mode

Conflict: Desert Storm 2

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC
Publisher: SCi
Developer: Pivotal Games



Unsurprisingly, *Desert Storm 2* is taking the action out of the soft stuff and into urban environments. Improved AI is evident, but shame about the US subtitle: *Back to Baghdad*

Vectorman

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Psuedo Interactive



Surprisingly for a game that's being developed by the creators of *Cel Damage*, *Vectorman* was pretty entertaining, playing like a thirdperson *Out Trigger* with a *Halo*-like aesthetic

Star Fox 2

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house/Namco



Another update of a classic Nintendo franchise that disappointed this year, due largely to its rudimentary splitscreen multiplayer, this was little more than a fairly standard action title

Altered Beast

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Wow Entertainment



The update to a 'classic' whose appeal has always escaped **Edge**. Admittedly it was shown in video form only but it didn't look that exciting despite the high number of enemies onscreen

Warhammer Online

Format: PC
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Climax Nottingham/Games Workshop



Warhammer Online continues to impress – and not just technically. The real promise is due to the devotion and detail that's gone into adapting it to a massively multiplayer environment

Wario World

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house



Signs suggest that Wario's new adventure will have fewer puzzle elements than the Game Boy outings, but more than makes up for this with hectic combat and a host of novel minigames

Headhunter Redemption

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Amuze



Jack Wade returns and brings along a lady friend. The game therefore builds on the well-received original but there wasn't enough shown at E3 to really distinguish this from competitors

Destruction Derby Arenas

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Studio 33



It may have immediate appeal and was perfect for the hustle and bustle of E3, but **Edge** wasn't entirely convinced by *DDA*'s loose handling, poor framerate and apparent lack of depth

EyeToy

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: In-house (London Studio)



London Studio's clever toy comes with 12 simple yet rather entertaining games. You feel a little self-conscious interacting with the screen on a busy show floor, but imagine the potential

Ratchet & Clank 2: Going Commando

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Insomniac



Despite the introduction of an RPG-style experience system, *Ratchet & Clank 2* felt a bit like more of the same. Still, owners of a savegame from the original will be rewarded

Rise to Honor

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: SCEA



This Hong Kong Fuey Jet Li vehicle was disappointing. It has a combat system similar to that of *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* but suffers from Magnus Pike syndrome. Needs improving

SOCOM II: US Navy SEALs

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Zipper Interactive



Shown in offline and online form and one of the more popular offerings on Sony's stand, this accessible shooter delivers better graphics, improved weapons and new mission modes

Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: In-house (Sony Bend)



The distinguished sequel improved a good deal on the original *Syphon Filter*, so **Edge** was expecting more from this next-gen version. Poor targeting and bland visuals don't auger well

Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles

Format: GameCube
Publisher: SquareEnix
Developer: In-house



E3 provided fairly ample vindication for Square's decision to create a more immediate and action-oriented vehicle for its biggest franchise, and this feels perfectly suited to GameCube

Final Fantasy X-II

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SquareEnix
Developer: In-house



X-II certainly cements Square's reputation for producing beautiful games, but E3 is hardly the best environment to assess its stat-heavy, slow moving RPGs, of which the game is the latest

Final Fantasy XI

Format: PS2, PC
Publisher: SquareEnix
Developer: In-house



Although this provided attendees with a taster of Square's online universe, there was little on show that would be news to anyone familiar with a game that's already live in Japan

Sword of Mana

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: SquareEnix
Developer: In-house



In all honesty, this was a title that proved almost totally inscrutable at E3, because of the amount of dialogue that needed to be waded through before the action started. Which says something

Drakengard

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SquareEnix
Developer: In-house



Combining aerial sections that are comparable to a free-roaming *Panzer Dragoon*, and ground combat akin to that featured in the *Dynasty Warriors* series, this was a pleasant surprise

Hidden & Dangerous II

Format: PC
Publisher: Take 2
Developer: Illusion Softworks



Although hardly able to win the E3 graphics war, Illusion's creation could at least claim victory in game engine flexibility, allowing the title to be played in first-, thirdperson or RTS perspective

Space Colony

Format: PC
Publisher: Take 2
Developer: Firefly Studios



Run your space colony populated by a dysfunctional crew. Defend it from alien attacks while keeping an eye on the management side of things. Different, with a certain charm

Alter Echo

Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: THQ
Developer: In-house (Outrage Games)



An action game, *Alter Echo* is clearly still early in development, the stylised visuals appear to suit the action well and some of the gameplay touches are intriguing

Broken Sword III

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Revolution Software



On current evidence Charles Cecil's team has successfully translated the point 'n' click formula into a more palatable form for the modern age. The game looks beautiful to boot

Charlie's Angels

Format: PS2, GC
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: In-house



Although it captured the colourful sense of character of the first film, this was one of the few disappointments at the Ubi Soft stand, and felt fairly uninspired and ordinary

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: In-house



The other disappointment was this, a thirdperson action title that looked like it shared an engine with *Charlie's Angels*, along with its uninspired and ordinary brawling dynamic

Far Cry

Format: PC, Xbox
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Crytek



Idyllic island locations are the backdrop for this very promising FPS based around 'action bubble' moments. The AI is unpredictable but, at the moment, enemies move too erratically

XIII

Format: Xbox, PS2, GC
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: In-house



In spite of fairly linear level design, this was another strong title that left a positive impression of Ubi Soft's stand, and was certainly more stylish than a lot of stuff on show

Fallout : Brotherhood of Steel

Format: Xbox, PS2
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Interplay Entertainment



Transposing the classic PC RPG series to a thirdperson action universe doesn't appear to have been hugely successful, though E3 didn't offer the opportunity to really get to grips

Judge Dredd

Format: PC
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Rebellion



This is a title that didn't deserve to be tucked away at Vivendi's stand – certainly not while *The Cat in the Hat* was on prominent view. **Edge** is optimistic that this will do justice to the law

Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC, PC
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Warthog



It's got space combat sections and it's got traditional FPS levels. But the integration is unsubtle and loading times are currently lengthy. Optimisation could still save it

Metal Arms: Glitch in the System

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Swingin' Ape Studios



Metal Arms' best feature is that you can 'jack' into selected robots and take command of them remotely. This aspect works well and supports an engaging arcade shoot 'em up with a twist

StarCraft Ghost

Format: Xbox, PS2
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Blizzard



A lot of love has clearly gone into this FPS translation of the 'Warcraft' universe, but all is let down by static AI. There's time, but not even outlandish weapons will compensate

World of Warcraft

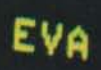
Format: PC
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Blizzard

There were promising signs that Blizzard will be able to bring its slick presentation skills to the MMRPG sector, but it'll need to judging by the amount of competition on display at the show



















Photography: Martin Thompson

TV games

No, the revolution will not be televised. Edge watches the videogame industry slip into something less comfortable for its biggest broadcast outing ever

It is a beautiful, beautiful day. You could tell this wasn't typical for the capital even if you didn't live here. Miserable London faces are stretched to breaking point with half-smiles. The cyan sky is so bright it almost penetrates the smog that hugs the Thames. Even the birds would be singing, **Edge** supposes, if there were any birds to sing apart from those blasted pigeons. But even the pigeons look happy, or at least less… ratty. Two policemen share an ice cream, and offer **Edge** directions to London Studios, where the magazine is heading. But not to host a 'Trisha'-style chatshow – "I Love Nintendo But My Husband Won't Import!" – or at least not yet anyway. **Edge** is here for 'Game Stars', the first dedicated videogame show to make it on to primetime terrestrial TV for five years.

The last, of course, was 'GamesMaster', which finished in January 1998. 'GamesMaster', the standard reference point for gaming on TV, was never very good at portraying the industry as an inclusive, forward-thinking place to be, perhaps because it wasn't and isn't. It was a show made for us, or at least us when we were in our mid-teens. It is often considered by lamenting retrospecteurs as the golden era of gaming on TV, but **Edge** prefers to think that the golden age hasn't happened yet, and that when it does it'll be built on a more solid foundation than cyclical challenges and pointless cheats.

And since then? 'Bits'; variously sexy, stupid, funny, irritating, but predominantly old news and skewed reviews wrapped up in geek fantasy. It was fun, as long as you watched it without really paying attention, and



If your game was up for an award, you'd have been sat here, along with the industry's marketing and PR types

its timeslot meant it didn't have to worry about *them* getting it because only *you* stayed up to watch it. 'Thumb Bandits' tried a little harder, sacrificing some of the humour and enthusiasm for Iain Lee and the hope of some respect. It made some factual errors that pedants turned purple over, but it was a decent attempt. It stayed in its timeslot, and it isn't coming back.

'Thumb Candy', Iain Lee's one-off glance at the history of gaming, was the best attempt; everything squeezed into an hour. One hour, to say everything. Ambitious. 'Thumb Candy' offered glimpses of what a proper series could do – that brilliant Matthew Smith interview, for example – but, constrained by finite time and the one-shot format, the show crushed acres of anecdotes into single quips. Besides, who saw it? It's not like Channel 4 threw the whole weight of its marketing department behind the show.

See, it's not so much that the industry's lacked a broadcast champion as any sort of presence at all. And that makes 'Game Stars' position on the Easter Sunday schedules all the more precious, and that's why **Edge** is here to cover the taping. If this magazine is a journal, then it needs to record important moments in the evolution of the UK videogame industry, and if this is the start of something, then it deserves appropriate coverage in the magazine. Besides, **Edge** muses, as it walks into the building's entrance hall, it should be an easy enough day – just turn up, follow the PR around, make a few notes, and watch it all run like clockw—

"OH MY GOD WHERE ARE THE SHIRTS?" She skids to a halt just in front of **Edge**, totally hyper, meeja to the hilt, face wracked with slightly contrived panic. "We need those shirts. For the judges. Now!" There is some more exposition which **Edge** doesn't really catch, and then the panic's passed down the chain of command, resulting in a runner rushing off to a nearby clothing shop, with a handful of £20 notes.

(She returns in half an hour with three unbranded red T-shirts. Price: £6 each.)

Clockwork. Today is the culmination of months of planning, and everything must come together in the next ten hours. The sets are built and the celebrities booked, the script written and the crew ready. But it's the little things that cause big problems, such as the lack of suitable shirts for the game judges, and everyone is on edge. Games haven't been on TV for a long, long time, and a lot of people aren't sure they should be even now. There's a long way to go until the panic moves to the editing suite.

"It's not so much that the industry's lacked a broadcast champion as any sort of presence at all. And that makes 'Game Stars' Easter Sunday schedule all the more precious"

And then there are the kids, of course. Never work with children or animals, so the saying goes. It might have added, "and if you can avoid having to conform to the ITC's guidelines on videogames, that'd be great too," but we'll come to that later. For now, let's stick with the children part: one of 'Game Stars' components is a section devoted to finding the UK's 'greatest gamer'. Trials have taken place nationwide and whittled the number of competitors down to nine, the majority of whom are under 18, and at least one of whom is hyperventilating. **Edge** is ushered along a corridor to meet them.



Vegas mugs for the camera. His appearance made for one of the celebrity performances of the evening

The room where they're waiting is a lot like a school common room. In fact, the whole building's like a school, albeit one with a lot of expensive AV tech. On the way to meet the competitors **Edge** passes Lisa Maffia enjoying her lunch in the canteen, and for a minute it feels like non-uniform day at Grange Hill. But the people in here *are* in uniform, each wearing a 'Game Stars' T-shirt with matching nervous smile. There's no trash talking, nor confidence, just quiet chat about games and nerves. **Edge** blows the day's biggest surprise by revealing to a group of them that later they'll have to compete on *Dancing Stage Megamix*. "Aw, no," says one. "That's a girl's game."

Perhaps. *Dancing Stage* was a fantastic choice for the competition, its inclusive nature providing pro-gaming propaganda, showing that gaming isn't all guns and cars. Visually it worked well on camera, too, as did *Rogue Leader*, which would make up for what it lacked in true multiplayer competition with a concept that viewers could easily grasp. *Crash*, the first game to test the competitors' skills, was less successful. As dull to watch as it is to play, it's unlikely the 30-second segment of linear, pixel-perfect jumping did anything to persuade anyone that videogames have changed in the last 15 years.

But the game's presence isn't really an error of judgement that can be entirely prescribed to the programme makers. The games in the competition weren't chosen entirely on the basis of their suitability, but for a variety of political and contractual reasons, and **Edge** hopes that next year circumstance will go some way to allowing 'Game Stars' to capture the true essence of multiplayer competition. Besides, the hunt for the UK's greatest gamer took less than five minutes of the show. The rest was the awards ceremony.

Edge arrives at the rehearsal as Ash are finishing their first run through of 'Lose Control'. There is awkward applause. What *is* the etiquette for congratulating bands when they've finished their first mime of the day? Charlotte, the lead guitarist, picks her apple back off the dead amp behind her and takes a bite. The studio crew murmur questions and answers, and then the band get set to go again. Charlotte puts the apple back, and the cameras swish back into position.

It occurs to **Edge** that this is how television works. Everyone has one single thing to do, one very specific job, and they do it over and over again until all the cogs rotate at the same time. Like clockwork, see? And this is dead time, hours before we go live, time for the watchmaker to tinker with the pieces until they fit. The autocue winds back and forth, the VT on the screen behind the band scratches to a suitable position, the guy carrying the cable moves back to where he started. Ash lose control again, or pretend to.

Were the bands suitable for 'Game Stars'?



Konami's *Dancing Stage Megamix* is warmed up for the competitors (left). Ash (below) give it some beans with a run-through of 'Lose Control', which provides a link to the videogame world thanks to its appearance on the *Gran Turismo* soundtrack. Elsewhere, T P-T *nearly* lands a kiss on an award winner



The pint-sized Sarah Cawood (left), who teamed up with Terry Alderton for presenting duties, ensures that fans leave with a reminder of the evening. Anxious production staff look on as another challenge is prepared (above). The engine room (below): where videogames are made to look as appealing as possible – albeit within the suffocating boundaries of the ITC, of course

There are plenty of arguments for the inclusion of musical spots – sexycool music cachet to attract non-gaming teens, adding credibility to a show that would otherwise depend entirely on games, a way of breaking up the digital monotony – but on playback they appeared particularly incongruous. The Brits has music acts to punctuate its ceremony because music is what it's celebrating. Here there's no connection, and there has to be a more coherent way of pacing the programme.

The show starts filming for real at 8pm. By then the guests have all arrived, mostly suited PRs and execs from the publishers whose products are well represented. They're ushered into the studio by stressed staff, who urge them to take their places quickly because there's not long to go before filming starts. First on, though, is a warm-up comedian. He does not warm up the audience one bit, dying a painful death. An anti-videogame quip thrown in at the start induces a stretch of awkward silence **Edge** hasn't witnessed since THQ called to ask about the *Dark Summit* score.

But Terry Alderton, the main presenter of 'Game Stars', does a fine line in geek humour. He sprinkles the pauses between takes with videogame impressions. When he finds out the table closest to him is filled with Konami staff, he slips comfortably into Solid Snake. When he does the Codemasters title screen – "Codemathters" – he asks if anyone from the publisher is in attendance. There's no reply from the audience. "Good," he continues. "*Colin McRae 3* was shit." Everyone laughs. "No, seriously. I waited ages for that, and when it arrived…" He looks down glumly and kicks a foot at the podium. If this is someone doing an impression of someone who likes videogames, then it's a damn good one.

What of the celebrities who present the awards? Mostly they are a success. Pratchett's appreciation of computer games is self-evident, and he chats briefly about them before handing out an award. Nell McAndrew couldn't care less about them, but her Lara Croft past justifies her presence. David James' love of the PlayStation is notorious, infamously blamed for a soft goal he conceded some years ago; he enjoys an awkward chat with Alderton before heading back to the green room for some *Capcom vs SNK*. Johnny Vegas (who presents two awards thanks to Vernon Kay's unexplained no-show) is brilliant, looking as much like a stereotyped gamer as Nell McAndrew doesn't, and spinning tangents into jokes that have the whole room laughing. John Thompson, another celeb gamer, gossips with Alderton when the mikes are off.



Sports Interactive's Miles Jacobson sees how Nell McAndrew got the Lara Croft gig – it's the height

But some are less entertaining. Behaving particularly badly is hyperactive idiot-for-hire Tara Palmer-Tomkinson, who disappears into the bathroom just before her appearance. Last minute nerves, perhaps. Jade Goody is equally moronic, but fractionally less offensive, at least until you consider her paycheck. Still, both Goody and Tomkinson provide that peculiar kind of 'Heat'/'OK!' C-list celebrity, faces for people to recognise. And their presence also gives 'Game Stars' potential to form the backdrop to some kind of tedious gossip. It doesn't – the closest the ceremony comes to controversy is when Nell and Tara arrive wearing the same skirt – but even that might have made the tabloids.

"Terry Alderton does a fine line in geek humour, sprinkling pauses between takes with videogame impressions. When he spies Konami's table he slips into Solid Snake mode"



Backstage, tactics aren't shared, because everyone wants to nab the top prize and a trip to E3 in LA

C-list culture is everywhere, but thrives on television. Look on TV, or at the schedules, and thrill at the cheap and cheerful programming. Roughly 95 per cent of everything on there is an absolute waste of time, but remains there because regardless of what *you* think, someone's enjoying it. It gets the viewing figures. Funnily enough, 95 per cent of **Edge** readers doubtless thought 'Game Stars' was a waste of time, but that's because it wasn't made for you. Consider it a Trojan Horse, because the show's sellout aspects that so many of gaming's self-professed evangelists found so reprehensible means that there's a far greater chance of something they *will* respect making it on to TV at a reasonable hour, reasonably soon. There are no guarantees, though, except that 'Game Stars' will return next year, and previously wary producers may give the show a chance to grow.

And the best reason they'll have to do so is this: the programme was clearly a spectacular success. Every advertising slot sold out within five days of them being offered, and 5.5m people watched the show. That's over 27 times the circulation of Britain's best-selling videogame magazine, which illustrates just how massmarket a proposition videogaming is when we make the kind of concessions that 'Game Stars' did. Not just concessions to producers determined to popularise a culture perceived by TV people as niche, but also from the men and women who decide what's safe for broadcast and what isn't.

Let's give you an indication of how television rules affect videogames on television: while the cameras were free to shoot the celebs playing *Capcom vs SNK 2* in the green room, the early show time meant the game couldn't be shown on TV because of the potential for strobing. There was no room to take risks. Part of the editing process consisted of the 'Game Stars' team sitting in a room with a guy from the ITC who watched the tape from front to back and gave a binary commentary throughout: "Yes" meant the segment could go in the show. "No" meant it stayed out. No arguments. TV bosses are wary of games, because they're not used to dealing with them. They had the power to pull the show right up until it aired. We know by now that they didn't, and **Edge** is grateful.

When 'Game Stars' closes, with Lisa Maffia looking less like a town-centre schoolgirl and more like a death-dealing pop vixen sent from Brixton to destroy us all, it's just past 10pm. After that is the aftershow party, where **Edge** watches the losers of the gaming competition cuddle up to Sarah Cawood, and the 15-year-old winner reveals his plans to seek sponsorship. And then it's truly All Over. By the time **Edge** leaves it is night, cold and clear. The start of summer. Not a perfect start, sure, but something to build on.



06

Once, Twice, Three Times a PC

The wonder-machine may have been reviled by vociferous Spectrum owners the length and breadth of '80s England, but at least the C64 looked like a proper computer, boasted games to match and was adored the world over. **Edge** traces the retro-chic rise of the 8bit stalwart that debuted such legends as Bruce Lee and Impossible Mission

The Commodore 64 features in 'The Guinness Book of Records' for the enviable feat of selling over 17m units, which officially makes it the biggest-selling computer ever. Impressive for a machine that, despite six iterations, changed little anatomically during its ten-year reign. Its high-resolution graphics frequently equalled NES and SMS, and undoubtedly drew much of the contemporary western development community into the videogaming fold. But what of the C64's status in the collectors' market of the 21st century?

The burgeoning retro industry has attracted more than its fair share of bandwagon jumpers. Collectors and retro fans alike look with particular disdain on collector 'yuppies': people who jack the price of an unsuspecting eBay *Panzer Dragoon Saga* into the spending stratosphere, whether they own the appropriate region host system or not, simply for peer kudos. Thankfully, the C64 largely avoids such types, instead attracting the attention of a more distinguished senior crowd – namely people who owned the system first time around. Antiquated data storage alien to the younger gamer, coupled with the demise of Commodore in 1994 (so there are no updated franchises to inspire younger retro fans to investigate series' roots), ensures that the popularity of the C64 scene remains on a more even keel than its rival systems'.

In the launch issue of **Retro**, Computer Exchange's marketing manager divided collectors into three categories: the hardcore collector (looking to complete rare series), the designer furniture lifestyler (looking to find the apartment-defining *Pong* machine) and, finally, the gamer (looking to access childhood lost). While the first two types usually steal the column inches, the last profile accounts for the bulk of the C64 community. Although that's not to say Commodore believers aren't fanatical. The difference is that such unshakable enthusiasm isn't expressed financially. The most expensive C64 items rarely break the £100 mark, and you can count such titles on one hand.

Tapping the nostalgia market

Everyone remembers his or her first home computer with affection. The statistics say it all: if you were a PC-using westerner growing up in the '80s, then you probably owned a C64. The resurgence of '80s vogue is attracting swathes of older fans back to the system they grew up with for two

Model Student

Commodore 64
This is the old model of the C64, released in 1982. Even at the time, the machine was criticised for being aesthetically blocky (it was later dubbed the 'breadbin') and not 'modern' enough. Still the preferred incarnation for the senior collector.

Commodore SX-64 – Executive Computer
Released in 1983, the Commodore SX-64 was one of the first 'portable' colour computers. The sheer weight of the machine renders the proto-laptop selling point laughable. It boasted a built-in disk drive and speakers, and an internal 5-inch colour monitor with sharp display. It had a cartridge slot on top, but no datasette interface, so playing games from tape was impossible.

Commodore 64C
The newer model of the C64, released in 1986, had a slick and (at the time) trendy cream-coloured case. A revised SID chip made sampled sound very quiet and the motherboard was smaller. Improving chip technology enabled Commodore to reduce the number of chips without affecting functionality.

Commodore 64 Gold
When one million C64 units were sold in Germany in 1986, Commodore released a limited edition Golden C64: serial numbers 1,000,000 to 1,000,199. C64 GOLD was presented to the public in the BMW museum in Germany and is now a highly sought after item.

Commodore 64GS
Released in October 1990, this was Commodore's first and final dedicated games console. Besides the fact the Amiga was already on the market, few wanted to buy what was essentially a slightly cheaper C64 stripped of all non-gaming functionality. The C64GS came with a cartridge containing *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top of Fun*, *Klax*, *International Soccer* and *Flimbo's Quest*.



Commodore's empire was built on technology such as this. While not of particular value early counting machines like this one are certainly of interest to videogame historians



Commodore's marketing campaign was nothing short of ruthless. Statements such as the one above certainly had the desired effect



The C64 was on the market for so long that curios such as the COME (COmputerised Muscle Excerciser and Trainer) were manufactured

key reasons. First, there's the nostalgia factor – the smell of a C64, the minimalist 16-colour screens, the clunk of a rare cartridge, the ghoulish squeal of a loading tape deck… Then there's SID, the C64's sound chipset, which still arouses a level of fanboyism unrivalled by any other videogaming aural processor. The C64 was the first personal computer with an integrated sound synthesizer chip and SID has since gone on to be esteemed as an instrument in its own right.

Compare the number of C64 fan pages to Sega Saturn's, for example, and you'll soon realise the extent of the system's popularity. However, because nostalgia rather than gameplay and specific developers attracts enthusiasts, its collectors' market remains a very different beast. Emulation, coupled with the disintegration of magnetic tape games, leaves only hardware and disk/cartridge-based media for product-hungry fans. Still, it's only one piece in the C64 enthusiasts' jigsaw; the C64 scene is more an enthusiasts' market than an exclusive and expensive gaming club – and Commodore's fans seem quite happy with that…

From Auschwitz to infamy

Jack Tramiel, Commodore International's founder, is undoubtedly one of the most interesting characters of the early '80s computing scene, and responsible for bringing computers into the home years before Bill Gates declared his desire to give everyone in the Third World access to a PC. A Polish Jew who had survived six years in Auschwitz, Tramiel moved to the US after the war, where he joined the army and gained a posting at Fort Dix in New Jersey. Here he learned to repair typewriters. Commodore International was founded in 1955 after Tramiel moved to Toronto. In partnership with Ricoh, Commodore swiftly moved from building adding machines to electronics, making a deal with Casio in the '60s to put together calculators.

In 1976, Tramiel secured a deal to buy the small chip manufacturer MOS Technologies for $800,000 (£490,000). This was a key deal – MOS was responsible for manufacturing the 6053 microprocessor that lay at the heart of both the Apple 2 and Atari 400 and 800 series computers. With the purchase, Tramiel entered the world of '80s Silicon Valley and gained renown for his often unorthodox business practices. Michael Tomczyk, former Commodore employee



Some of the earliest examples of Japanese programming can be found on the C64, eg this port of *Gradius*. At £8, they weren't cheap



If low price point marketing wouldn't shift units then tights and t-shirts were bound to. It's a theory Edge has begun to adopt itself

Made in Japan

Contrary to popular belief, there were a number of Japanese titles released specifically for the C64. Vic Tokai developed a couple of games in the US, including *Aigina's Prophecy* and a conversion of *Shinobi Legions*. Allegedly, many early C64 Japanese developers penned software for the system, although how many of their games were released is unknown. In addition, there's the catalogue of cartridges for the Commodore MAX machine, some of which weren't released outside of Japan (Hal Laboratories, now working with Nintendo on many titles, wrote most of these). Konami also released some of its conversions over here, such as *Nemesis* and *Jail Break*, while others, such as *Castlevania* and *The Simpsons Arcade*, only made it to the US.




Jack Tramiel (pictured third from left) was Commodore International's founder. A Polish Jew, he was originally named Idek Tramielski and his first job was repairing typewriters

and Tramiel confidante, relates in his 1984 book 'The Home Computer Wars' how, in 1981, when US interest rate levels rose to 18 per cent, Tramiel simply stopped paying Commodore's bills in order to deposit all income into high interest bearing accounts. Tramiel got away with this stunt, netting a large profit, and began using the trick more often.

Al Acorn is quoted in Steven L Kent's 'Ultimate History of Videogames' describing how Commodore frequently let suppliers continue to ship product to them while neglecting to pay the bills. When the smaller company ran out of available cash, Commodore would step in and buy the supplier for a small amount, forgiving their own debt at the same time. Tramiel's eagerness to cut costs was fuelled by his desire to get home computing to as affordable a price as possible. His favourite slogan was: "We're building computers for the masses not the classes." While bullying his R&D departments to find cheaper ways to construct the machines, he also used his other acquired factories, such as MOS Technologies, to supply components at cost price.

Launched in 1977, the Commodore's PET was the first home PC to retail for under $1,000 (£612). In 1981, the company released the VIC-20 (originally called the MicroPET) at a cost of only $300 (£184). The VIC-20 signalled Commodore's first involvement with the videogames scene. The machine used the VIC-I (6560) video chip, which Commodore itself had designed in 1979. Originally, the idea was to sell the chip to thirdparty manufacturers for use in videogame machines, but because no one wanted it, Commodore decided to manufacture its own system and recoup its losses instead.

Trojan horseplay

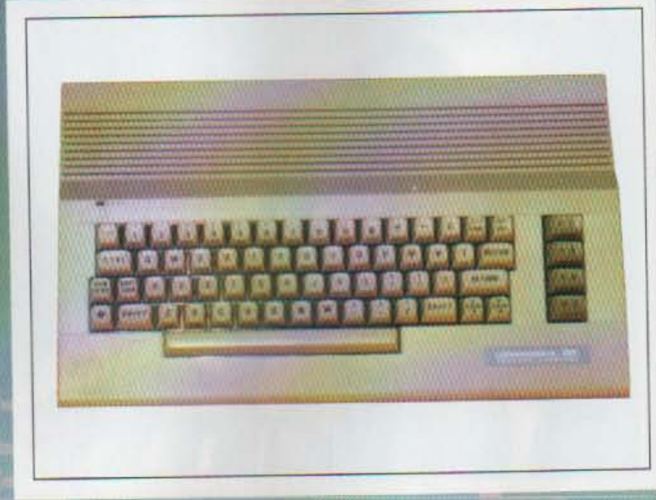
While the VIC-20 teams were hastily putting this first games machine together, the company's R&D was already putting together a new, far superior successor. In August 1982, Commodore launched the C64, a professional home PC marketed as a serious rival to the $1000 Apple II, at a stunning retail price of $595 (£364). In reality, even with 64K of memory (although 39K was reserved for BASIC, machine code could theoretically use the whole 64K), the C64 was primarily considered a games machine, thanks to its advanced sound and colour capabilities. Nevertheless, a

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One fansite proudly displays this signed business card from Gremlin Graphics. The tag line is, "For amazing graphics and outstanding sound effects run a gremlin through your micro



The Rolls Royce of C64 machines was launched in the BMW museum in Germany. Numbered 1,000,000 to 1,000,199 the C64 Gold demands heavyweight prices



The classic 'breadbin' layout of the C64 was typical of the period. Similar keyboard interface designs can be seen in contemporary Amstrad and Atari machines

diverse range of word processing programs, spreadsheets, BASIC and other 'business' applications also helped to cement its reputation as a serious workstation.

The C64 operated 170K single-sided disk drives, which only used Commodore's proprietary disk format, while games came on one of three media: diskette, cartridge or cassette tape. The drives hooked up to the computer via a daisy-chain link that could include other Commodore-compatible peripherals. Disk-based games certainly comprise the lion's share of the contemporary C64 gamer's collection.

The platform proved so successful that, by January 1983, Forbes reported Commodore was shipping 25,000 units a month. As the videogames industry stared into the void of the early '80s crash, the company was having unprecedented financial success, establishing a gaming platform all set to weather the imminent storm...

The key to Commodore's success was its incredibly low manufacturing costs and highly desirable software. It's been estimated that a C64, even in 1982, cost the company around $135 (£83) to manufacture per unit, while it sold at retail for $595 (£364). And costs were reduced even further to $35–$50 (£21–31) by 1985, when the machine was selling for $149 (£91). Commodore was winning on every front and in 1983 became the first computer company ever to report a $1bn (£612m) sales year, surpassing Apple for market penetration. Soon after this unprecedented announcement, Commodore reduced the price of its key consumer product to $200 (£122).

This price point meant that owning a PC was a possibility for families across the western world. And because the C64 could be used to program games, it wasn't long before the first coding stars began to emerge in the UK and US. Magazines, influenced by Trip Hawkins' (EA's founder) policy of promoting designers, gave profile to coders and musicians such as Jeff Minter, Tony Crowther, Rob Hubbard and David Whittaker. Even the cult of the videogame magazine celebrity arose during these heady days with 'Zzap! 64' a springboard for the likes of Chris Anderson (founder of Future Publishing) and Steve Jarratt (**Edge**'s launch editor).

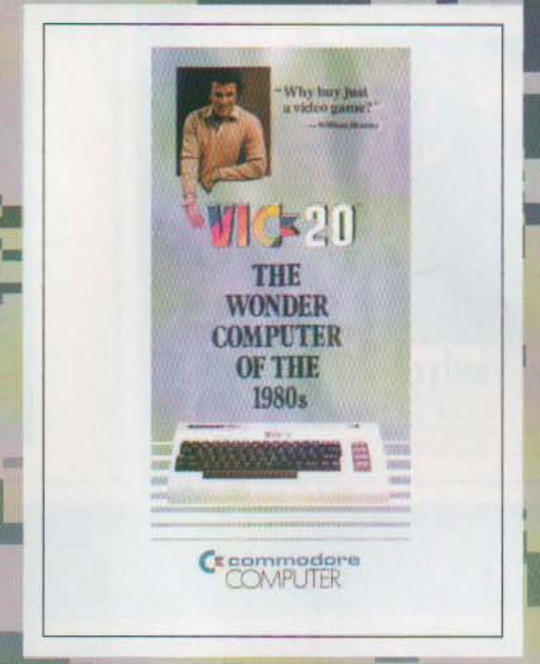
Commodore was expert in marketing the PC at just the right level, whichever country it launched in, and such a skilled approach earned swathes of loyal fans outside the US.

The lost games

Prototype games always arouse particular collector interest. Other than obvious titles that simply fell by the wayside (the cartridge version of *Last Ninja 3* springs to mind), there are a number of interesting tales of long-forgotten failures on the C64. An Ocean conversion of *Parasol Stars*, for instance, was allegedly written on a freelancer's development system stolen before the game was finished. The station was never recovered and work on the title never resumed.

The original *Who Dares Wins* was the victim of a court injunction when it was considered too similar to *Commando* for comfort. The ease with which you could pilfer sprites and maps from other games and simply change the title screens, etc, was well known. Infamous are the tales of *The Great Giana Sisters*, a *Super Mario Brothers*-alike that was pulled from UK shelves after a week due to copyright infringement, and *Katakis*, similarly dumped on account of its extreme likeness to *R-Type*. The court injunction didn't stretch as far as Germany, apparently, as both titles remained on sale there.

News in 1999 of a supposedly lost Matthew Smith/Software Projects game that was found on some disks ready for the US market stunned the C64 community. The title was *Mega Tree: Jet Set Willy 3* and the story was propagated by Stuart James Fotheringham, who claimed the title featured "Matthew Smith's game design, Marc Dawson's programming and [my] own graphics." The validity of this story has yet to be proven.



William Shatner helped promote the VIC-20 in the early-'80s offering the phlegmatic soundbite, "Why buy just a videogame?" Why indeed?

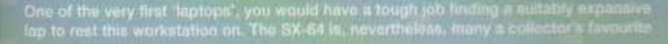
Commodore 64: Tech Specs

Internal
MOS 6510 processor @ 1.02MHz (PAL speed is just under 1MHz)
20K ROM
64K RAM
39K available in BASIC
Commodore BASIC version 2.0 (written by Microsoft)

Graphics
VIC II (Video Interface Chip)
40 columns x 25 rows
16 colours
256 characters, 62 graphic characters
8 hardware sprites
320x200 maximum resolution

Sound
SID 6581 (Sound Interface Device)
(8580 in the C64C and GS models)
3-channel, 8bit sound
9 octaves
4 waveforms
Programmable ADSR
Programmable filter





One of the very first 'laptops', you would have a tough job finding a suitably expansive lap to rest this workstation on. The SX-64 is, nevertheless, many a collector's favourite



C64 was never a serious music workstation but this didn't stop many a fledgling composer taking their first tenuous steps into the world of midi courtesy of Casio and Commodore

But between 1984 and 1988 the company went through some drastic changes. Tramiel resigned as CEO on January 13, 1984 and went on to buy Atari Corporation. In turn, Marshall Smith, the new CEO of Commodore, a 54-year-old finance specialist from the steel industry, bought Amiga and downsized the company, cutting payroll by more than 45 per cent. Commodore released and then doomed the Commodore 128 by cutting the cost of the C64 to $150 (£92) at the same time. While the company at home continued to go through financial difficulties, the C64 continued to flourish, largely thanks to the undying support of customers and thirdparty hardware and software developers.

In 1990, the final iteration of the hardware, the 64GS was released to a muted reception (see 'Model student') and by 1991 both Atari (with its ST) and Amiga had overtaken the C64 in popularity. The C64 was discontinued in 1993 and on April 29, 1994, Commodore International announced that it had been unable to renegotiate the terms of its outstanding loans and was closing the business. The liquidation process lasted for months, largely due to the size of the corporation. On April 20, 1995, Commodore was sold to the German company ESCOM for approximately $10–25m (£6–15m).

Best days of their lives

Edge has many friends who are fanatical about Commodore 64. One of the UK's most famous and influential collectors and experts of '80s videogaming is **Jonathan Dyton**, a self-confessed unreconstructed Sega and C64 fanboy. At 33, Dyton is a typical C64 gamer – he received his first Commodore machine for Christmas in 1983, along with Imagine's *Arcadia 64*. After working for both Microdealer and Activision, an unquenchable passion for collecting and dealing led him to open a shop in Milton Keynes. Although the shop ceased trading some time ago, Dyton is recognised throughout the global scene as an expert on C64. So why does he think the Commodore 64's endured for so long?

"These days, we're used to an incredibly quick turnaround for hardware. At the time, systems endured for longer because it took longer to develop new systems. By the time the Amiga and Atari ST emerged, they were far more expensive than the C64. Remember, this was in 1985–86, when the price of a C64 had been drastically reduced, so the



Commodore was expert at picking inspiring images to go with its campaigns but the quality of text often didn't quite match. The advert above grates especially



Commodore game artwork has long been an easy target for point-and-giggle design jibes but it would be foolish to argue that it didn't have the desired effect at the time

Commodore 65

Commodore was only a few months away from going into production with this super 8bitter before it dropped the project. With graphics reportedly closer to Amiga quality, a dual SID stereo sound (six voices), built-in 3.5-inch disk drive and more advanced BASIC, one can only speculate as to how this system may have changed history. After Commodore's bankruptcy, a warehouse of these prototypes was discovered, and the systems (many of which were functioning) sold. Commodore only offloaded 200 beta versions of the Commodore 65 in a special sale.



The C64 scene was a truly global one. Home Entertainment Suppliers, makers of this handy Turboload, hail from Australia



Add-on hardware is rife for the C64. The collector who sets his sights on a complete hardware catalogue has a long and winding road ahead

'bang for your buck' ratio was pretty good. Once a machine has a userbase, it's hard to ignore it because people keep on writing games and the whole thing perpetuates itself. One mustn't forget that, as far as Europe was concerned, software on a C64 was a fraction of the price of the equivalent game on a console. The Mega Drive and SNES both had to drop to the price level of a C64 and have vastly superior software before they finally killed the machine off. The fact that anyone on their own could write software for the machine helped immensely."

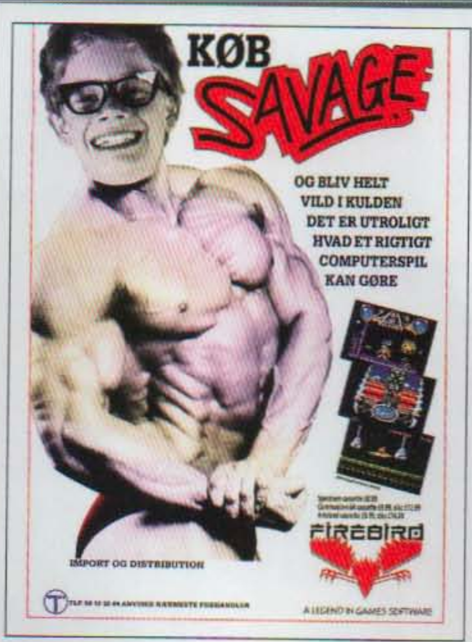
Schooldays and the social climate of the times crossed with the type of software available for the machines. If your family was cost-conscious, it tended to buy a Spectrum or maybe an Oric. If there was an academic outlook, then possibly a BBC. But if you had a little cash kicking about, but still wanted value, then a C64 was the best option. The software was a fraction of the price of console software, and boasted more, better and cheaper games.

C64 software went through several different stages. The first two to three years were largely dominated by console conversions (eg ports from the Atari 2600) and arcade adaptations, thanks to the likes of Activision and Atarisoft. Ostensibly, then, the C64 of this era was a console. Dyton agrees, "The likes of *Bruce Lee, Beach Head, Bounty Bob Strikes Back*, Paul Woakes' *Encounter!* and *Raid on Bungling Bay* are pure console titles that, if it hadn't been for the videogames crash, would surely have emerged on the ColecoVision and 5200. Then you have an influx of quality British titles, the music on those is what drives many people, I believe. Games such as *Monty on the Run, Crazy Comets, Skate or Die, Commando, Parallax, Last Ninja*... then came a wave of intelligent, multiplayer games."

So is the machine's popularity on the increase? "While nostalgia for the C64 is on the rise," says Dyton, "I'm sceptical that collecting has risen accordingly. There are machines out there that have far more credibility as far as collectors are concerned. There's little Japanese software on the machine the average collector is aware of and certainly little they can obtain. However it's still a newbie's dream. You can go to an image site [ROMs only apply to cartridges; disks and tapes for emulators are called images for the C64], play the games and then buy the titles you want, for under £100."



There are so many examples of great character-filled artwork from the C64 era. Many collectors buy these titles for their aesthetics now



This Danish advert displays a kind of self-deprecating humour that would be great to see return in today's cynical videogames marketing

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This C64 advert is from 1985. Much is made of Commodore's chip-making plant (to explain the low price) but until recently the history books kept quiet on how this was achieved

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But surely the inherent perils of tape storage will deter many new collectors? "Most C64 collectors buy games for the packaging alone," explains Dyton. "Most games are downloadable as images, so media perishability isn't much of an issue. You're essentially buying packaging with the C64; something that many US titles do fantastically well. They're presented in gatefold sleeves, have cloth maps, controllers… there's a pop culture quality to it all."

Other systems are famed for specifically collectable developers, and Dyton believes the C64 is no different. "Pre-1987 Electronic Arts, Epyx, Lucasfilm, Origin and big-box era Infocom are highly sought after. UK developers are more collectable on C64 than any other system today, with the likes of System 3, Thalamus, Ultimate, and even US Gold and Ariolasoft, becoming increasingly attractive. First, it was a console, but then a new breed of software emerged, such as *Alter Ego* from Activision. That was more sophisticated than anything else out there. The C64 is different in that it was a machine completely dominated by western game writers, so many games just oozed quality."

But why hasn't such quality translated into monetary value? "There aren't as many people attempting to buy credibility through these retrogames. Owners make do with an image until the game comes up at the right price. Many people simply want to enjoy the music again and don't even need to buy the games, thanks to SIDplayer. It's organic growth in the C64 scene, rather than boom and bust. Prices are consistent and slowly rising, but the availability of images and the lack of a rarity-driven style otaku movement on the machine stop things from getting daft."

With this in mind, **Edge** finally asks the million-dollar question: if most retro systems survive today by virtue of being 'fun to play', does Dyton think there's a sense of nostalgia over gameplay when looking at the C64's desirability? "Personally speaking, it's half and half. I enjoy remembering times past, but many of the games are the sorts of titles that made the Game Boy such a great machine and continue to sell on the GBA. Games such as *Bruce Lee* or *Impossible Mission* are as good as anything else of that era. If they were Japanese, they'd be hailed as masterpieces, but in today's climate they're seen as part of junk culture. And that's nothing short of a tragedy."

Continued

The Collectables

As mentioned previously, Commodore 64 games come in one of three formats. Cartridges plug straight into the cartridge port (in true console style), while tapes and floppy disks require external add-ons to run. Bargains are to be had everywhere on this system, from the local car boot sale to eBay, so remember to do a bit of research before you commit to anything.

Prices are for indication only and presume condition is excellent to collector's grade. This guide has been produced in conjunction with Jonathan Dyton and Mat Allen.

Satan





Value: £90–110
Release: 1990
Developer/Coder: Dinamic Software/Luis Mariano Garcia

While the tape and disk versions of this truly excellent side-shooter are easy to find, the cartridge-based game is one of the system's most sought after rarities.

Double Dragon



Value: £70–80
Release: 1992
Developer/Publisher: HES/Melbourne House

An Australian release of the Melbourne House version that was only sold at one computer show back in 1992.

Ultima 2





Value: £100–125
Release: 1984
Developer/Publisher: Sierra

The influential series of proto-RPGs. Cloth maps, spell books and other great packaging elements put these firmly in the must-have section for serious collectors.

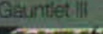
BoulderDash 3





Value: £20
Release: 1984
Developer/Publisher: American Action AB

An authorised but lesser-known *BoulderDash* sequel, developed by a Swedish company. Set in space with a bas-relief star background and a spacesuit-donning Rockford.



Gauntlet III





Value: £40–80
Release: 1992
Developer/Publisher: US Gold

The disk version of *Gauntlet III* hardly managed to get off the development machine before the rug was pulled. Only a few actual duplicated copies made it out.

Space Gun





Value: £10–20
Release: 1992
Developer/Publisher: Ocean

The cartridge version was released by Ocean in the last dying days of the machine, and is a pretty good game to boot.

Elite





Value: £5–20
Release: 1985
Developer/Publisher: Firebird

Despite rife slowdown, this still attracts a good price (particularly on disk). The smart packaging is another plus for collectors.

Ancipital





Value: £5–10
Release: 1984
Developer/Publisher: Llamasoft

Jeff Minter takes the flick-screen arcade adventure format, adds animals and waves of things to shoot in this compelling (and original) title.

Wanted: Monty Mole





Value: £5–10
Release: 1984
Developer/Publisher: Gremlin Graphics

The Steve Crowther game that most remember. A scrolling platformer with smooth gameplay – and a social commentary on the miners' strike.

Beach Head

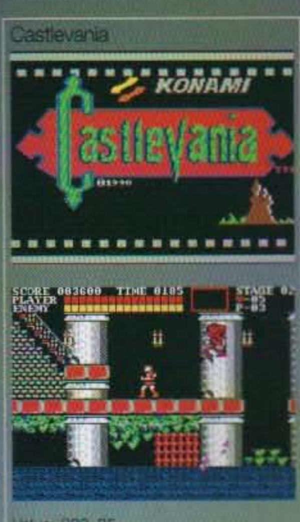




Value: £10
Release: 1983
Developer/Publisher: Access Software

Defined the battle action genre of multiscreen shooting games, and allegedly the first title to get to number one in the C64 charts.

Castlevania



Value: £20–35
Release: 1990
Developer/Publisher: Konami

An extremely rare conversion (by Alan Stuart) of the *Akumajou Dracula* title, originally released in 1987.

Racing Destruction Set



Value: £10
Release: 1985
Developer/Publisher: EA

Create your own tracks and choose your own cars in this classic racing game. Avoid the near-crippled tape version and opt for the US import with its quality packaging.

Alter Ego



Value: £5–15
Release: 1986
Developer/Publisher: Activision

A life sim created by a real psychiatrist. Available in male and female variations, and probably the game most people download when they take their first emulation step.

Forbidden Forest



Value: £5–10
Release: 1983
Developer/Publisher: Cosmi

Perhaps the original survival horror title. Waves of textbook horror film monsters and an over-the-top orchestral soundtrack add to the beast-blatting thrills.

Paradroid/Uridium



Value: £5–10
Release: 1986
Developer/Publisher: Hewson Consultants

No listing of Commodore 64 software would be complete without these. Available as a double-pack, there are rarer games out there, but few remembered with such affection.

Raid on Bungeling Bay



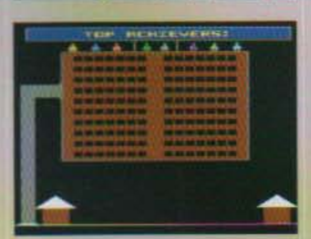


Value: £15–20
Release: 1984
Developer/Publisher: Broderbund

This game's level maker inspired *Sim City*, as Sid Meier always enjoyed building the cities in the game more than the actual shooter.

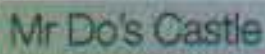
Bounty Bob Strikes Back





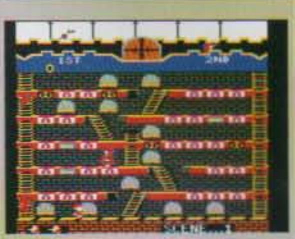
Value: £5–10
Release: 1985
Developer/Publisher: Big Five Software

A good example of how the C64 enhanced console titles. Hard to find, but it's a fraction of the price of the Atari 5200 version (at around £60).



Mr Do's Castle





Value: £30
Release: 1984
Developer/Publisher: Parker Bros

Parker Bros' videogame crash-era title is a definite must-have for both the quality of the packaging and the game itself.

M.U.L.E.





Value: £20–50
Release: 1983
Developer/Publisher: EA/Ozark Software

Classic multiplayer trading game that in many ways defined the boundaries between arcade games and more cerebral computer pleasures.

The Great Giana Sisters





Value: £20–25
Release: 1987
Developer/Publisher: Rainbow Arts

This *Super Mario Brothers* Xerox job was ignominiously pulled from the UK shelves after a court case. But it remained on sale in Germany.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance

Completing *Aria of Sorrow* left **Edge** with Castlevania withdrawal. There was nothing for it but to brave the confusing castles of *Harmony of Dissonance* again



(Game Boy Advance) Konami

Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast

Edge knows its 'Star Wars' addiction has gone too far when it needs to fuel the passion with banal games like this. Here's hoping LucasArts' next stuff is good.



(PC) Activision

Kung Fu Chaos

It will probably get overlooked by most players which is a shame as this provides a genuinely varied and engaging single- as well as multiplayer experience



(Xbox) Microsoft

Halo: Combat Evolved

Edge spent a weekend introducing a gaming virgin to Master Chief, and ended up falling in love again… with *Halo* you understand, not Master Chief. (Or the virgin.)



(Xbox) Microsoft

The harm of dissonance

Why we'll never get rid of bad games

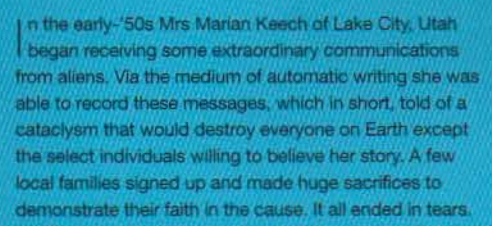
In the early-'50s Mrs Marian Keech of Lake City, Utah began receiving some extraordinary communications from aliens. Via the medium of automatic writing she was able to record these messages, which in short, told of a cataclysm that would destroy everyone on Earth except the select individuals willing to believe her story. A few local families signed up and made huge sacrifices to demonstrate their faith in the cause. It all ended in tears.

The day of reckoning came, but there was no fire and brimstone, trembling of the Earth, or even a light shower. All the cultists were devastated: Mrs Keech snapped her magic pencil in two, male family heads shook their fists at the sky and the children cursed that they had endured so long without soap. Or at least that's what you would expect to have happened. In actuality, the prophecy's failure merely strengthened the flying saucer cult's faith. Only two members left, the rest went on to proselytise their doctrine with even greater ardour.

Investigating this phenomenon, psychologist, Leon Festinger, discovered that the 'disconfirmation' of a belief often led to a renewal of energy in the faith and not, as most would predict, an erosion. It seems that if believing in something has involved personal sacrifice, humiliation or privation then people are less likely to want to admit to their mistakes. Festinger coined the phrase 'cognitive dissonance' to account for the discrepancy.

Which brings us on to *Enter the Matrix*. Now it's true to say that there's been a lot of hype surrounding both the game and film. It's also true to say that many magazines have typically caved-in to both explicit and implicit pressure to make sure the game does well. But what is mystifying is that a minority of people have actually convinced themselves that *Enter the Matrix* is a worthwhile purchase. By any objective measure the game is poor, suffering from countless design and technical travesties. **Edge** can only surmise that admitting to spending £40 on a game so riddled with problems is a humiliation too far.

Sure, it may be cool to wall-run behind an enemy then hand-slap them to the ground in slow motion, but it's usually more interesting if you can actually see the action being performed. **Edge** will not be proselytising the merits of *Enter the Matrix*. Beware those who do.













Enter the Matrix

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox, GC, PC** Publisher: **Atari** Developer: **In-house (Shiny Entertainment)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**





For all of its sixth-form philosophical complexities, 'The Matrix' has a lot in common with 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. In one sense, it is a tale about removing the wool from people's eyes and allowing them to see the truth. Now, far be it from **Edge** to claim to be a lone voice of reason. But as this issue goes to press, the newly renamed Atari has just announced that *Enter the Matrix* has entered the sales charts in the US and Europe at number one, having sold a million copies in the week since it went on sale.

And yet, irrespective of the degree of prelaunch hype and commercial success, *Enter the Matrix* is a very poor game by any rational or fair yardstick. Atari and Warner Brothers appear to have achieved a deception on a massive scale. There is very little to redeem this as a videogame at all, save for the much-vaunted live-action sequences that book-end the action. Even these are rather limp by cinematic standards, and less formally experimental (and satisfying) than the seamless transitions in EA's *The Lord of the Rings*. If anything they serve only to highlight the general inadequacies of *Enter the Matrix* as a game, and specifically as a game based on the 'Matrix' universe.

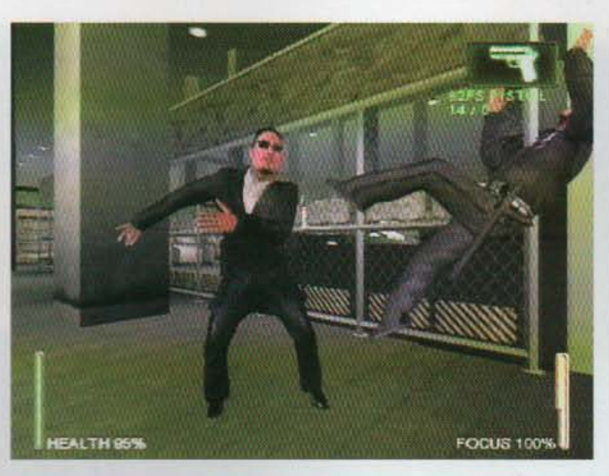
In particular they draw attention to the deficiencies of the hefty number of game engine cut-scenes that punctuate your progress. These are creaky to say the least, featuring blocky characters and cars that lump around Spartan surroundings on hexagonal wheels. Even so, they still depict your character engaging in a much more acrobatic and exciting range of actions than those possible during the game proper.

Those Spartan environments persist throughout the game, which sees you take on the role of Niobe or Ghost to battle through a series of missions with the aid of an almost limitless arsenal and a recharging Focus meter that allows frequent recourse to bullet-time. On a positive note, Focus does allow players to pull off some impressive slo-mo manoeuvres, such as running off a wall to drop kick an opponent, or cartwheeling away from streaking bullets while returning fire.

However, such balletics are largely unnecessary since it's generally easier, if you're slowing the action down, to simply disarm multiple enemies or run from side to side while shooting. Still, slowing down the action does serve to allow a much closer and lengthier inspection of the game engine's broken bits than would be possible

Previously in E122











Enter the Matrix singularly fails to capture the grace or guile of the films on which it is based. Indeed it's hardly even able to match most thirdperson videogames in either department

Hacked off

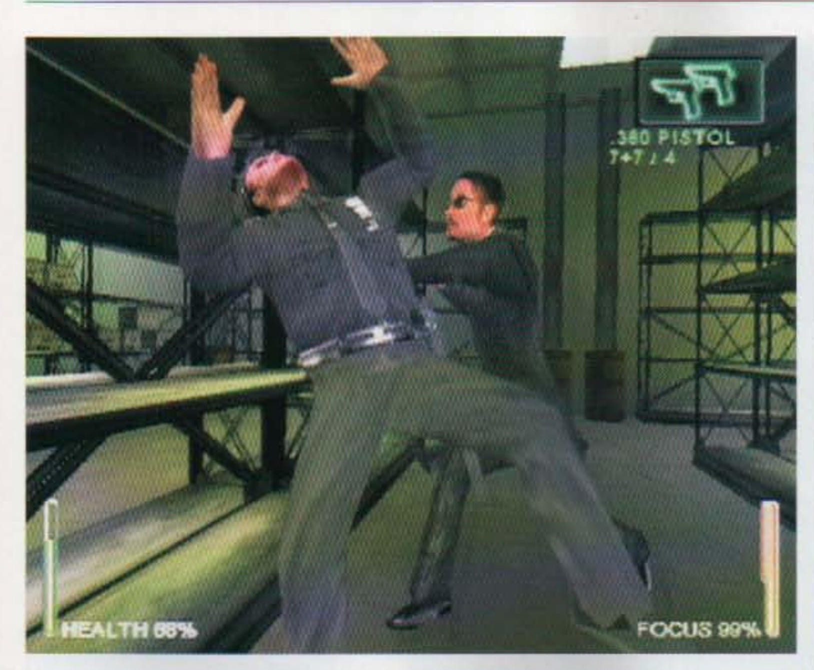
One of the game's few redeeming features is the inclusion of a hacking minigame, which allows players to unlock background art, in-game models, cheats and so on. It's far too brief, but it does demonstrate several moments of ingenuity. Essentially it's a combination of logic puzzles and clues that allow several 'drives' to be accessed in succession, and eventually a cursory conversation with the likes of Trinity. It's just a shame that as much design artistry doesn't appear to have been employed in the main game.

at normal speed. Those broken bits include, inter alia, an epileptic camera, character models that slide around apparently at random, divorced from their environments, and bullets that shoot out of gun barrels at all sorts of physics-defying angles.

No doubt some of these technical shortcomings are down to the game having been rushed out in time for the film's May 15 US release (though it *was* in development for three years). The frontend and interface, for example, each show signs of having been put together at the last minute. Minor quibbles, such as a font that's too tiny to read, or inappropriate default menu selections would surely have required little work to get right. But the game also demonstrates clear signs of confusion, and a lack of design vision from the outset. The controls, in particular, are clumsy and ill considered, with no meaningful strafe, an almost totally unnecessary firstperson mode, and most actions driven, badly, by context.

Perhaps this confusion is a result of the involvement of the Wachowski brothers, who are credited as the writers and directors of the game. Apparently a pair of self-professed gamers, there's no sign here that they know anything about videogame development. Mission objectives, for example, are uninspired and barely communicated to players; some are elucidated in onscreen dialogue boxes, but it's frequently necessary to resort to the game's clumsy menu system to check whether mission objectives have been updated. Certainly there's little in-game indication as to what's going on. Most of the time though it's simply a case of either

"Irrespective of the degree of prelaunch hype and commercial success, Enter the Matrix is a very poor game by any rational or fair yardstick"









Screenshots might make camera angles like the one above look dramatic and compelling. While trying to play the game, however, they're just confusing and clumsy, even during the slo-mo bullet-time sequences





Red pill, blue pill

Although the missions undertaken by the two characters are broadly similar, there are one or two points of divergence and difference. The most fundamental is that, during driving missions, playing as Niobe entails actually piloting the vehicle, while playing as Ghost merely involves taking out targets. There would certainly be sufficient difference between the characters to merit playing through as both – if only the game itself merited repeated playing.

eliminating all opposition or getting from point A to point B (some of the time without a lot happening during the journey).

Indeed, technical failings aside, poor design is evident throughout. There are the illogical events that occur throughout the game, for example, such as doors that inexplicably open after you've shot all the bad guys in the area. Or the huge amount of redundant architecture – be it the cavernous but empty environments, or corridors in which nothing of any gaming value happens whatsoever. And there are the missions that vary in length and intensity, seemingly at random, offering no sense of coherence.

There does come a point, during the middle third of the game, at which a clever use of overblown music does imbue the action with a frantic and tense feeling of rhythm, and it consequently threatens to become reasonably entertaining. But just as these levels are beginning to banish memories of barren and boring early levels, the game suddenly shifts into chase mode, introducing a number of stages in which the only objective is to run away from superpowered Agents, and the only challenge is that of a rather long winded and tedious memory test. Even then there's still room for things to get worse, and the final couple of levels, set in the poorly textured tunnels of the 'real' world, are almost laughably inept.

"To anyone who's experienced the most meagre handful of averageware titles, this is just a fairly boring and fairly cynically marketed non-event"

No doubt there will be those among the million people who have bought it already, and the millions more to come, who will enjoy *Enter the Matrix*. If you've never played a thirdperson action adventure title before, then this does offer some moments of novelty, and even enjoyment, over the course of its lifespan. But to anyone who has experienced the most meagre handful of averageware titles, this is just a fairly boring and fairly cynically marketed non-event, written and directed by two men who, on this evidence, ought to stick to making films.

Indeed it's ironic that a film so successful in adapting videogame tropes to the cinematic form is rewarded with a videogame tie-in that's so singularly unable to reciprocate the favour.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Brute Force

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studio** Developer: **Digital Anvil** Price: **£40** Release: **June 20**

Brute Force embodies a particular problem with the Xbox. Although J Allard pledged to "underpromise and overdeliver" during the console's lengthy gestation, Microsoft evidently continues to churn out games that overpromise and underdeliver. *Brute Force* is one of them. The problem is that a borderline average game leaves an all-too-bitter taste in the mouth when it has been presented as some sort of gaming panacea. Microsoft only has itself to blame though; by touting *Brute Force* as the next *Halo*, and by utilising a frontend, control scheme, audio effects and aesthetic that deliberately evoke Bungie's masterpiece, Microsoft has created a rod for its own back, and dramatically emphasised the shortcomings of its rudimentary squad-based thirdperson action title.

"It's another example of Microsoft's scattergun approach to quality control and an unnecessary reminder of the likes of Azurik and Nightcaster"







There's very little reason to use the special abilities of squad-members, save for heat vision, which makes up for not being able to to see very much due to the game's murky visuals

The one thing it hasn't borrowed is *Halo*'s design excellence. *Brute Force* is, put simply, an average game masquerading as an excellent one. No cliché is left unturned as an utterly inconsequential and meandering plot sees your band of stereotypes traverse six different planets. The two male leads are predictably gruff (example quote, voiced in sub-bass, "We fight together, we die together"), while the two female squad-members are, naturally, a match for them (and one of them keeps banging on about files, "I've seen your file, Tex. You've got an impressive record," etc).

Switching between the four during missions, or assigning rudimentary commands ('cover me', 'fire at will', etc) is done intuitively and swiftly via the D-pad, and each possesses a unique special ability that can be used until a stamina bar runs out. Far from the overblown promises that were made early on in the game's development though, in which these special abilities (invisibility, auto-target, firing with two guns, or heat vision) would facilitate a degree of tactical depth, most prove almost entirely redundant.

Indeed apart from a handful of sections that appear to have been explicitly designed to require their use, the only useful ability is Brutus' heat vision. This almost always comes in handy since highlighting enemies in vivid orange compensates for a screen that is otherwise ordinarily obfuscated, either by the thirdperson perspective, or by textures that are, despite their bump-mapped crispness, fairly uniform in appearance.



As far as brainless shooters go, *Brute Force* isn't a bad game but it's not a great one either. The squad-based aspect proves largely redundant because of some very ordinary level design. It's not the next *Halo*

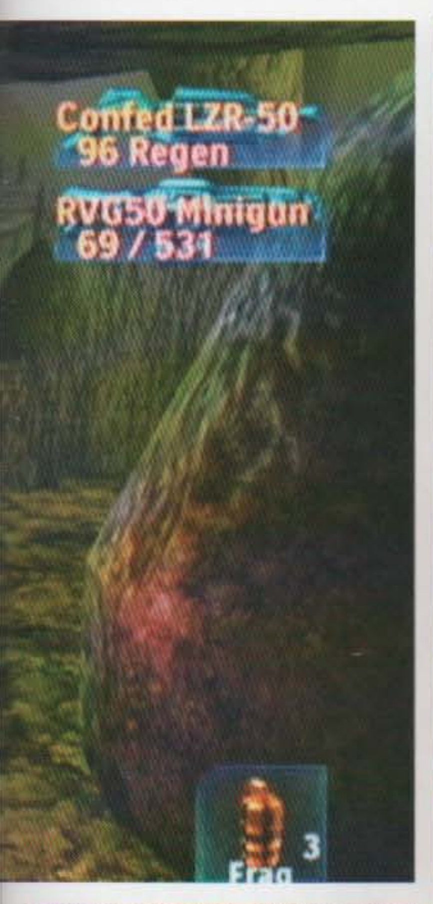
Another feature strangely absent from Microsoft's prelaunch checklists is the AI that, while passable for much of the game, still happens to collapse under rudimentary challenges now and again. AI-controlled, squad-based action is fine in theory, but if, in practice, it involves reaching the end of a level intact only to have an automaton team-mate dispatch your entire squad with a poorly placed grenade, it's not much fun.

Equally unremarked upon when Microsoft was overpromising, is the overwhelmingly linear level design that's made it into the finished game, punctuated with hoary design memes such as exploding barrels, and mindlessly scripted enemies.

One upshot of these design traits, is that the game might as well not be squad-based at all, since there's little tactical incentive to swap between characters. So even a cooperative multiplayer component does little to enliven events (particularly because, unless played over a system link, the splitscreen view makes it even more difficult to see what's going on).

The Deathmatch multiplayer mode is similarly afflicted, and exacerbated by the inadequacy of the game's targeting system. It does have its moments, largely engendered by the special abilities of deathmatch-only characters (unlockable by retrieving their DNA during the singleplayer game).

Previously in E112, E116, E121











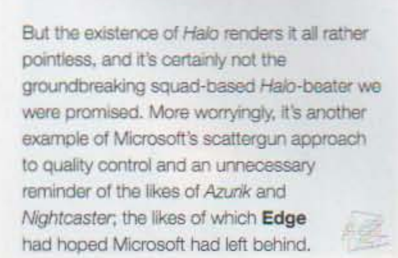




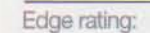
"Six different exotic worlds!" trumpets the press release. Shame, then, that they're drawn from the same selection of uninspired environments featured in every videogame ever; there's the lush tropical jungle, a lava-filled alien homeworld, etc, etc. It wouldn't be so bad if they weren't all texturally bland and repetitive, but there's nothing that's not been seen, and done better, before

Militia characters, for example, can call in air strikes, while shamanic characters have access to massively destructive magic. In general though, they do little to elevate deathmatches above the ordinary.

In spite of these criticisms, *Brute Force* is occasionally entertaining, albeit in a predictable way, and in a far from sustained manner. Indeed, in spite of the disappointment relative to the prelaunch hype, *Brute Force* isn't especially bad.



But the existence of *Halo* renders it all rather pointless, and it's certainly not the groundbreaking squad-based *Halo*-beater we were promised. More worryingly, it's another example of Microsoft's scattergun approach to quality control and an unnecessary reminder of the likes of *Azurik* and *Nightcaster*; the likes of which **Edge** had hoped Microsoft had left behind.



Edge rating: Five out of ten

Send in the clones

Throughout the game, stereotypically heroic meatheads, Tex, Brutus, Flint and Hawk spend most of their time engaged in po-faced posturing. Yet since they're all clones, each is introduced with a cut-scene showing their previous demise. The irony of establishing such rigidly gallant characters with a movie showing their previous inadequacies seems lost on the developer, and serves only to highlight the game's fundamental and sometimes stultifying lack of humour.



PlanetSide

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Ubi Soft** Developer: **Sony Online Entertainment** Price: **£35 plus $13 (£8) per month billing** Release: **Out now**

Previously in E123









There are still plenty of bugs in *PlanetSide*, and players can expect a large amount of patching, even after the game has made it to the shops



Persistence pays

PlanetSide is a persistent world. This means a battle that a player fights on one day might well be raging several days later. It also means that characters develop over time, giving players greater impetus to get in on the teamwork and to join the in-game clans or 'outfits'. It also means that the title demands a monthly subscription and will receive extra content from the development team as the game progresses.









The game's connection to US servers suffers enormously thanks to the transatlantic link. Thankfully European players should benefit from the Amsterdam server which has gone live at the time of writing

There can be few more daunting tasks in gaming than being a total beginner in *PlanetSide*. Enter the starting base of your chosen faction and there are hundreds of players running everywhere, scores of confusing messages written in complex jargon and a frightening array of buildings, consoles and controls. Find your way to the training area and fun is immediate in the form of firing ranges and vehicle test zones. But soon you'll have to enter the war proper. And it's not exactly straightforward.

PlanetSide combines the firstperson shooter, the massively-multiplayer RPG, and classic strategy elements of games such as 'Risk', to create a game that is astoundingly impressive in its scope. It is a perpetual war, raging across ten island 'continents', with conflicts featuring up to 500 players on an island and 5,000 on the planet as a whole.

Players soon hook up with one of the hundreds of ten-man squads that form in anticipation of action. More experienced players become leaders and guide the squads into battle. There's an enormous amount to get to grips with, not least given the bewildering variety of abilities that players can select. You can pilot tanks and hovering attack-craft, APCs and dropships, armed jeeps and armoured trucks. Soldiers carry rocket launchers, sniper rifles, grenades, plasma ejectors, anti-aircraft missiles, equipment for making repairs, half a dozen varieties of armour and tools for hacking into bases. The list seems endless, particularly when you consider wider variations between the three empires that players can serve.

Once in battle, bases are the key to war. Each base connects to a network. Capture all the bases and the continent is locked, placing your side on a winning footing. It is the activity of capture and the massive combat that it incurs that provides the meat of the game. Players gain points from their experiences, which can be spent to increase the possible certifications of a character to use weapons, vehicles and equipment.

Overcome the complexity, the lag issues, and the obsessive nature of the online gamer and a *PlanetSide* newcomer will discover a wealth of incredible experiences: an inspiring world of futuristic combat that only videogames and the minds of other, real human beings could possibly hope to create. *PlanetSide* is an event in gaming, and one that's not to be taken lightly.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Rise of Nations

Format: PC Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Big Huge Games** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E123**

Microsoft does itself few favours with the marketing pitch for *Rise of Nations*. Combining realtime action with turn-based depth is hardly radical. To push this as the game's USP suggests nothing more than a me-too addition to the publisher's formidable library of strategy titles. But as sales pitches go, it is at least accurate. This, the latest opus from *Civilization II* and *Alpha Centauri* designer Brian Reynolds conforms almost comically to type. Fortunately, a lack of innovation is more than compensated by a rare degree of refinement.

Structurally, *Rise of Nations* is very much a progression of Reynolds' previous works, right down to the inclusion of multiple research threads, diplomacy options, trade routes and rare resources scattered over the map. Surprisingly, the switch to realtime hasn't necessitated the sacrifice of any of the complexity of these elements. If anything it brings greater focus, while also facilitating the addition of a large-scale combat element.

The opportunity to fight with multiple opponents, battling through ages that encompass spearmen through to nuclear warheads, provides a satisfying reward for time spent in research. Impressively, this portion of the game also exhibits little sign of compromise. Waypoint options are lacking, but controls for other parameters such as aggression and group formation are all present, correct and augmented by strong AI.

Where the game stumbles is in its eagerness to appeal to the mainstream. *Civilization* famously took an age to play, while here an epoch passes in around an hour. As a result it's possible to see all the building and unit variations the game has to offer after playing a mere handful of one-off battles. It's a testament to the strength of the multiplayer and campaign modes that such an error of judgement doesn't sink the game.

Ironically, *Rise of Nation's* success can be attributed to the lack of graphical niceties. Although handsome, the game's tile-based isometric viewpoints appear backward at a time when even the *Command & Conquer* series has embraced full 3D. Yet it's the simple presentation, coupled with an efficient user interface, which makes coordinating forces, while dealing with construction and research, so pleasurable. No other RTS title makes multitasking feel like such a natural process. Blessed with *that* USP, a lack of polygons seems rather irrelevant.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten







Combat in *Rise of Nations* is intricately varied, what with the potential for each faction to be at a different point along the technology ladder, plus several unit types unique to each race





Risk taking

The key to *Rise of Nations'* longevity lies in the Conquer the World campaign mode, which envelopes the core action with a turn-based framework that brings to mind the venerable board game 'Risk'. Controlling just one army at the outset, the objective is to spread first across a whole continent and then the entire globe, subjugating rival nations one portion of the map at a time. Each conflict brings new challenges, through geographical kinks, varying objectives (some of which eschew the game's construction component completely), and even tabletop-style bonus cards. It's an odd, abstract approach, but one that's highly effective.





IndyCar Series

Format: PS2 (version tested), Xbox, PC Publisher: Codemasters Developer: Brain in a Jar Price: £40 Release: June 20 Previously in E113, E120, E122









Speed, crashes, spills – it's all in here. *IndyCar Series* is one of the most thrilling serious racing experiences **Edge** has enjoyed in a long while





No wheel deal

The most significant area where *IndyCar* disappoints it has to be the lack of wheel support. **Edge** tried in vain to get its GT Force Logitech favourite working with the game which is particularly upsetting given the precision-heavy nature of the game. Another missed opportunity is the apparent lack of Live components for the Xbox version, which again is regrettable. Still, it remains a thoroughly captivating drive.





Thankfully your opponents behave with a degree of authenticity and displaying none of the drone-like qualities **Edge** has encountered in other oval-based racing games. Naturally, they also make mistakes...

Regular readers who remember **E**84's preview of Brain in a Jar's ill-fated *F360 Challenge* PS2 title will not be surprised that *IndyCar Series* is this good. **Edge** certainly isn't – that game marked the developer as one to watch when it came to four wheeled entertainment.

What is particularly impressive, however, is the way the intricacy of IndyCar racing has been so admirably captured and recreated in digital form. Obviously all of the licensed drivers and tracks are present (33 and 14 respectively, stat fans), as are, depending on your chosen difficulty setting, all of the rules and regulations of this relatively complex motorsport. But even a complete newcomer needn't feel intimidated as the game makes players of all levels feel welcome, taking them through every element in one of the finest tutorials **Edge** has come across.

Of course, representational accuracy is of little consequence if the technical aspects are left behind but again in this area *IndyCar* delivers. The sensation of speed is sublime, particularly from the in-car perspective (the one that **Edge** thoroughly recommends), and the attention to detail that has gone into recreating the tracks is up to the standards you'd expect of today's better racing games. (If there is one area of weakness, it's during the pit sequences where your crew isn't the most convincing representation around but still far preferable to not having a crew at all.)

It's easy to misinterpret IndyCar racing. Followers of the series on Eurosport will no doubt realise that there's a lot more to it than just turning left and avoiding other cars – pit strategy, fuel consumption and drafting, to name but three of the sport's many aspects, turn a seemingly simple formula into a battle of wits as much as driving ability – but **Edge** is equally aware that the nature of this form of racing won't appeal to many. The doubters among you should cast preconceptions aside, though, and give this a go. Sure, even on the easiest setting it's all a little hardcore but *IndyCar* has the capacity to thoroughly enthrall the player, driving you to adopt a level of precision and dedication not often demanded by racing videogames. You battle to shave off thousands of a second. And you enjoy every single one of them. It's exhausting but exhilarating stuff.

While *IndyCar Series* demands a significant investment from players, you don't often find a game this rewarding.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of ten

Lost Kingdoms II

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **From Software** Price: **£40** Release: **June 6**

There's been a worrying trend of late: videogame sequels tragically inferior to their originals. And we're not talking about updates of age-old licences here, these are sequels that have been built largely from the same technology, but are subject to lamentable design flaws. *Dark Cloud 2*, *Zone of the Enders: The Second Runner* and *Devil May Cry 2* all suffered from a readjustment of gameplay components. Now you can add to that list *Lost Kingdoms II*.

The biggest alteration has been in the move from random encounters to realtime battles. While it's true that random fights have drawbacks, in *Lost Kingdoms* they perfectly complemented the card-battling nature of the game. The circumscribed arena combat forced the player to make more strategical decisions about which cards to expend, which to ditch, and whether to sacrifice a card in an attempt to capture a new creature. Now, travelling through environments is a slog and the numerous creatures – even in such a fantastical setting – just look silly.

More importantly the generation of combat arenas clearly gave From Software more control over technical aspects such as perspective, camera adjustment and zoom. Combat is more sluggish in this disheartening sequel. The camera swings around annoyingly and the two levels of zoom (reduced from three) are inadequate for the action and battles in these larger landscapes.

There are some improvements, however, and while the overall experience has been poorly executed there's some evidence of imaginative design. This time, the cards in your deck will help you with puzzles as well as the combat. It's possible, for instance, to transform your character into a number of creatures to overcome obstacles. This increases the scope and range of your actions and is much more satisfying than the simple switch pulling of the previous game.

While the plot is more involving and the characters slightly more complex this is a depressing step backwards for the series. Indeed, in transforming the nature of the combat *Lost Kingdoms II* has significantly gone off course. The card collecting is still a joy but summoning your creatures is more erratic due to bad collision detection.

If you haven't played the original then don't be put off by this. If you have played the original then you won't be anything but disappointed by this clunky update.

Edge rating: Four out of ten





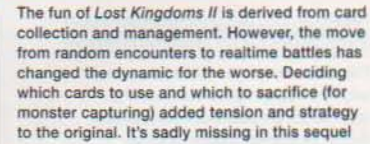












The fun of *Lost Kingdoms II* is derived from card collection and management. However, the move from random encounters to realtime battles has changed the dynamic for the worse. Deciding which cards to use and which to sacrifice (for monster capturing) added tension and strategy to the original. It's sadly missing in this sequel

Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Nerve Software** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now** Previously in E120











Graphics are functional but little more. Unusually, the online offering provides a noticeably better framerate than the offline component

Class action

The class/weapon specialisation is what sets *RtCW* apart from other Live FPS alternatives. Engineers can both lay and disarm explosives, making them an essential element of any attacking force. Medics can both provide health packs and reanimate dead comrades, meaning their contribution can be critical. Lieutenants hand out ammo and call in air-strikes. It is the successful manipulation of these elements that will bring about victory.





The weapons look the part but neither sound, nor feel meaty enough to provide any real satisfaction. Their ineffectual nature cuts deep into any pretensions *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* might have to realism

From FPS progenitor to lacklustre PC update, *Castle Wolfenstein* now returns as the latest Live thrill for console soldiers. Pitched somewhere between *Unreal* and *Ghost Recon*, it has reaction test, arcade roots and yet victory is very much dependent on cooperation and strategy.

Essentially, there are two separate games here, a shockingly poor singleplayer adventure and an all but essential online experience. Playing through the campaign game, you could easily believe that *GoldenEye*, *Half-Life* and *Halo* had never happened. There seems to be little, if no connection between where and how you shoot the enemies and whether or not they decide to lie down and die or keep shooting. A sniper rifle will kill in one shot, a rifle in two, a sub-machine gun maybe five or more shots. There is no feeling of power, no satisfaction in using your weapons and considering all that you do is run and gun, that is a serious fault.

Nor is there any real opportunity to use your brains to resolve the conflicts. Grenades are easily dodged and have a tiny blast radius, enemies continue to shoot even when being shot themselves and exhibit little in the way of thought or tactics. All the player is able to do is slug it out, often toe to toe, and hope that they can find enough health packs to keep fighting to the end of the level.

However, plug yourself into Live and a whole new game emerges. Now it becomes an education in teamwork and tactics. The class system means that it is up to players adopting the roles of medics, lieutenants and engineers to hand out the likes of health packs and ammunition. This combined with the requirement of each player to pick a weapon before they spawn means that there are no pick-up points on the maps. The change in dynamic from spawn point superiority to territorial advantage adds an immediate freshness and gives *RtCW* a flavour all its own.

As a conversion of a limp, two-year-old PC title it comes as no surprise that *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* has little to offer in the way of innovation, particularly in campaign mode. However, as a Live experience it ranks up with the best of what's currently available. Easy to use, fast, frantic and fun, at its best it encourages thoughtful, even considerate play, and that is something the Live roster can only welcome.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E122**

Probably the easiest and briefest outing for the franchise to appear on GBA, *Aria of Sorrow* is also the most fascinating and enjoyable *Castlevania* title to have graced the handheld. Only the most devoted fans are likely to be attracted by the game's future setting, or that there's a (not too well hidden) plot twist towards the end; most gamers probably don't play these games for their narrative qualities. What is interesting is that the game contains perhaps the biggest overhaul to the core mechanics of the series.

Not that the untrained eye will notice: all the explorative action hallmarks are included. Indeed this episode has perhaps the most exquisitely structured maps of the series so far, with judiciously situated save points, and well-placed teleportation points to temper the impact of backtracking. But it also features a collect-'em-up dynamic to add longevity and complexity. Collecting enemies' souls provides subweapons, defensive or latently offensive capabilities, and abilities and augmentations that unlock new areas (and the ultimate ending). A comprehensively reworked weapon (not just whip) upgrade system rounds out another satisfying instalment.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Although it doesn't take that long to complete, with over 100 enemies to provide new souls and the ability to trade these with others via link cable, there's something of a gotta-catch-'em-all urge to replay

Wakeboarding Unleashed Featuring Shaun Murray

Format: **PS2, Xbox** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Shaba Games** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E115**



There are plenty of challenges that have nothing to do with wakeboarding. Boat missions are fun but a bit of a distraction from the main game. Unlike Activision's better extreme sports titles, *Shaun Murray* is best enjoyed in short doses







For some people the phrase "most realistic water ever" will create ripples of excitement, sending them rushing to the shops. For the rest of us, sadly, it will not. Wakeboarding's not the best known of the extreme sports, but Shaba has gone all out with nine globe-trotting levels, your choice of seven faithfully-rendered professionals (none of whom you'll have heard of) and a variety of fun twoplayer modes.

Singleplayer progress is made by completing the tasks and challenges that become unlocked as you go. The familiar array of extreme sports grabs, flips and spins are present and correct and you can even let go of the rope while your momentum holds, but this is pretty limited in terms of exploration.

It's a likely enough prospect, worthy of the O2 brand. But where *Pro Snowboarder* was limited by linear downhill runs, and *Pro Surfer* restricted by wave physics, *Unleashed* is constrained by the fact you're being dragged behind a boat. The physics, water effects and trick system are all well executed, brilliantly so – and there's plenty going on – but when you're forced to spice up a wakeboarding game with 'driving the boat' sections you have to wonder.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Crazy Taxi: Catch a Ride

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Graphic State** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**





Crazy Taxi's structure is exactly the same as it's always been. Drive here, pick up passengers, and take them there before the time runs out. Except now the cars are sprite-based and a mess of pixels, and the passengers are flickering zombies





Let's go make some crazy money!" the overexcited announcer's voice screamed at the top of the game. "By porting this game to as many platforms as possible, regardless of whether the host is technically suitable or not!" it might have finished, but didn't. *Crazy Taxi's* appearance on the GBA is a surprise, but not an entirely pleasant one. While the whole game is in there – two courses, several ways of playing each, and the pleasantly distracting Crazy Box challenges – they're squeezed in with blocky sprite scaling and messy animation, and at the expense of the smooth ride that made the console versions so appealing.

Plus the technical limitations impact seriously on the street-level thrill. Sometimes your taxi goes through cars coming the other way. Sometimes it collides into thin air two feet to the left of an oncoming vehicle. Whatever, it all happens at a framerate that hurts the eyes and the head and has *Catch A Ride's* Dreamcast ancestor doing Crazy Spins in its console grave.

Regardless of technical achievement, it's a broken version of a brilliant game, fascinating but commercially redundant. Still, **Edge** looks forward to a C64 version. Just kidding; that would be Crazy.

Edge rating: Two out of ten

Lufia: The Ruins of Lore

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Atlas USA** Developer: **Taito** Price: **$30 (£18)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**

Lufia, perhaps unfairly, was never considered part of the holy trinity of SNES RPGs. Taito, however, has been keeping an eye on the development of the genre, and this entirely new GBA adventure tries its hardest to knit together the best refinements of a classic concept.

Battles are far from random, and the game becomes tactically balletic as you try to dodge the visible enemies, or finesse them into vulnerable positions. Combat is fast and fluid, with team-mates leaping in to fill the place of fallen comrades. And while the main story is vast, alchemic subquests and link-up play offer a change of pace for the wearied.

The capsule monster system has been expanded and overhauled for the Pokémon era – creatures captured in battle are trained, evolved and equipped with weapons and armour. They can then fight as one of your team, or combine with their human masters to create fearsome (and unpredictable) hybrids.

Everything you would expect is here – jobs, switch puzzles, grumpy grandfathers, cursed tail-rings – and is presented handsomely. Only the unforgiving and occasionally baffling structure of the story spoils an otherwise vintage experience.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









The physicality of the combat system extends to the world around you. Ice slides, snow drifts, cliff faces and crevasses impede your progress, but different characters can burn, slash and crush their way onward

MotoGP3

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Just as 'Days of Thunder' was derided by cynics for being 'Top Gun' in cars, Namco's *MotoGP* series could similarly be summarised as *Ridge Racer* with bikes. Which is not entirely fair – the series has matured in the last two years and once you upgrade to Simulation mode you'll find that reckless abandon gets you nowhere.

Crucially, though, this is up against Climax's own *MotoGP2* and falls some way short of the Xbox's finest racing game to date. The most noticeable difference is the sense of weight, which is poorly conveyed, both visually and through the DualShock pad. The handling model is more simplistic and it's not possible to lean your rider forwards and backwards for advantage.

For PlayStation2 owners, however, this is a very entertaining effort and along with tweaks to the handling (sudden movements are not penalised so harshly) there are a number of additions from *MotoGP2*. A fourplayer mode, a full 15 MotoGP tracks, 20 fantasy tracks and a Challenge mode will keep fans of the series entertained for many virtual seasons. A much tamer *MotoGP* to Climax's, then, but not without its own merits.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









MotoGP is visually impressive and shows just how far the PS2 has come in the last two and a half years. The Challenge mode is particularly engrossing and offers anything from slipstream competitions to track duels. And no racing game would be quite complete without a Ferris wheel (left)

Speed Kings

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, GC** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **Climax London** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**





Approach it expecting *SSX* rather than *Burnout* thrills and there's some decent enjoyment to be had from *Speed Kings*





Speed Kings is halfway to being a fantastically enjoyable game. As a *Burnout* with motorcycles – the graphical and structural influences are obvious – it fails to ignite, with sub-standard traffic routines and some dubious design choices. The basic-looking cars are often hard to see, often appearing where a rider has no chance of avoiding them. Collision detection is also draconian, with the line between a sideswipe and a crash too narrow to be exploited. Ignoring an increasing complexity of fast bends or awkward jumps, the game gets harder by limiting the view, dingy roads and heavy rain conspiring to make many crashes a fait accompli.

However, as an *SSX Tricky* with motorcycles it's a joy. While lacking the class of that title, pulling stunts on these bikes would be a pleasure even if they didn't earn valuable speed boosts. Rider animations are excellent, and the balance of precarious/possible is just right. Outrageous speed camera pictures are a great touch, and fistfights make for some spectacular sequences.

If every element had the joyous quality of the bikes (unlicensed but clearly recognisable) *Speed Kings* would be superb, but instead it's a silver lining with a rather large cloud.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

SOCOM: US Navy Seals

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Zipper Interactive** Price: **£50 (includes USB headset)** Release: **June 11** Previously in **E**112, **E**117









Voice communication adds a great deal to the atmosphere, and while Edge did experience teething problems, it's still early days for Sony's online infrastructure. There's much flexibility when it comes to selecting games and tweaking features while the frontend is superior to *Ghost Recon's*

PS2 owners shouldn't be too discouraged by the score at the foot of this page – the online component of Sony's first big broadband hope is robust and enjoyable. But inevitably, in a multiformat magazine, *SOCOM* has to go up against the best PC developers can muster. And judged against the likes of *Battlefield 1942* and *Eve Online*, *SOCOM* is weak.

Part of the problem, and one facing nearly every FPS on the PS2, is that the analogue sticks fail to empower the player. The oft-noted 'deadzone' becomes even more noticeable in an online arena where quick reactions are paramount. Draw distance is also relatively short which reduces the opportunities for forethought and careful planning. On a positive note **Edge** experienced very few glitches and though lag was sometimes evident, it was never pronounced.

There's nothing here that PC gamers haven't experienced many times before. And while *SOCOM* is a technically proficient effort on PlayStation2, the world that Zipper Interactive has generated never comes close to being as convincing as those seen on PC or Xbox. In terms of console online gaming, it's round one to Microsoft.

Edge rating: **Five** out of **ten**

Midnight Club II

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox, PC** Publisher: **Rockstar Games** Developer: **In-house (Rockstar San Diego)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Another month and another batch of driving games. The difference with *Midnight Club II* is that it comes from the Rockstar stable, so you can expect something as groundbreaking as *GTAIII*, right? Wrong. *Midnight Club II* is satisfactory, but no more. Where it scores points for delivering robust handling and online functionality, it falls down due to a hackneyed structure and rigid checkpoint racing.

Based largely around the knockabout energy of *Midtown Madness* it fails to improve upon such an old formula. Although some divergence from the racing set path is encouraged it's usually pretty obvious where shortcuts will lead to potential victory. Visually, too, *Midnight Club II* fails to impress and **Edge** can't help thinking that the evening premise is just an excuse to use drab textures and shorten draw distances for the benefit of a slicker framerate.

The eightplayer Network mode is reasonably good fun but it doesn't drastically boost a game that seems tired and derivative. Unfortunately, *Midnight Club II's* immediacy is short lived. There's some fun to be extracted, but why bother when *Burnout 2* offers a more glorious and comprehensive experience?

Edge rating: **Five** out of **ten**









Once you upgrade to a motorbike the game peps up considerably. Pressing L1 allows your rider to lean into corners for sharper turning – something which adds an extra layer of sophistication and excitement to the street racing. While the handling is immediate and robust, the game is let down by a repetitive structure and grey visuals

Hired Guns

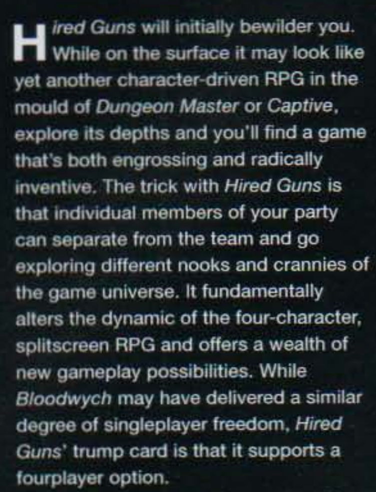
Edge takes a fresh look at a seminal game classic from yesteryear

Format: **Amiga** Publisher: **Psygnosis** Developer: **DMA Design** Release: **1993**





e enemies are not the game's rongest element, though lemmings make a cameo appearance



H*ired Guns* will initially bewilder you. While on the surface it may look like yet another character-driven RPG in the mould of *Dungeon Master* or *Captive*, explore its depths and you'll find a game that's both engrossing and radically inventive. The trick with *Hired Guns* is that individual members of your party can separate from the team and go exploring different nooks and crannies of the game universe. It fundamentally alters the dynamic of the four-character, splitscreen RPG and offers a wealth of new gameplay possibilities. While *Bloodwych* may have delivered a similar degree of singleplayer freedom, *Hired Guns*' trump card is that it supports a fourplayer option.

Although the plot is rice-paper thin – your crack team of mercenaries must take on a number of missions from an intergalactic corporation – the game's blend of exploration, problem-solving and combat will keep you engrossed. This is enhanced ten-fold when playing with friends on the same Amiga. And though it's certainly possible to backstab your colleagues (usually with some amount of glee and hilarity) good teamwork is the emphasis and many of the game's trickier enemies and puzzles require a degree of head-scratching and cooperation.

A large part of *Hired Guns*' charm lays in the fact that you soon become attached to and protective of your charge. An initial batch of 11 characters is available for selection, though customisation is possible with a versatile graphics editing facility. Choosing a balanced team is important for success. Droids, for instance, can last indefinitely underwater while Desverger the assassin comes equipped with a lethal sniper rifle.

Unsurprisingly, playing alone is somewhat ponderous, a factor not helped by an icon system that is unnecessarily fiddly. The time limits on some of the missions are equally annoying, especially if you are trying to ease a new player into the game's complexities. But *Hired Guns*' strength is in its ability to unite people and promote a general mood of good feeling and cooperation. And that can't be bad for videogames.



Edge rating: Eight out of ten





Play with three friends and the slightest 'accident' is likely to end in a furious deathmatch





Brutal truth

Ten years ago *Hired Guns* really was special and there were few games that could draw people together around one machine with such delightful consequences. It's all very slow and cumbersome now, but its advantage over today's cooperative games is that levels were intelligently designed to take full advantage of each character's special ability. Half-hearted attempts to build in such play modes to recent games (see *Brute Force*, p98) have mostly been an afterthought.

The making of…

Stunt Car Racer

The concept of marrying physics-heavy driving with rollercoaster environments looks like a ridiculous one on paper. Implemented with an expert touch, however, in practice it turned out one of the most thrilling and therefore memorable racing games of yesteryear



Original format: Commodore 64
Publisher: Microprose
Developer: Geoff Crammond
Origin: UK
Original release date: 1989

Although never one for self-aggrandisement, **Geoff Crammond** is one of the few veterans of the early days of home videogaming whose moniker still sells product. His work on well-loved titles for the venerable BBC Micro Computer quickly ensured that journalists and, more crucially, gamers came to see his name as a badge of quality, while work on the *Grand Prix* franchise in the last decade has sealed his reputation, alongside the likes of John Carmack and Sid Meier, as one of the industry's elite.

Crammond's calling card is undoubtedly his ability to simulate the nuances of real-world systems, something that can be traced back to his professional work prior to entering the videogame industry. "With a degree in physics, I was working in industry, where I wrote programs which did mathematical modelling of physical processes," he reveals. "I also did algorithm development and came into contact with realtime simulation work, programming in Fortran and C."

Then came the UK's first home computer boom of the early-'80s, with the Sinclair ZX Spectrum, Commodore VIC-20 and Acorn BBC Micro Computer leading the charge. Crammond chose to dip his toes in the water with Acorn's platform, writing his own interpretation of *Space Invaders* as a way of learning the machine's 6502-based assembly language.

His next two efforts were flight simulation *Aviator* and racing simulation *Revs*, both published by Acornsoft. The latter game proved particularly challenging, with the

unforgiving learning curve leaving some players unable to complete a single lap without incident.

The game did, however, reward the more patient gamer with a racing experience uncharacteristically realistic in comparison to other half-baked simulations of the day.

His next move was to switch development to the Commodore 64,

"One day I was driving this vehicle over the landscape bouncing around and came across a bit of the surface which formed a small ramp. I drove up it and launched into the air. That started me thinking"

the newly introduced successor to the VIC-20. The C64 was another 6502-based machine, but although the architecture of Acorn's BBC-brand machines made vector-style 3D relatively accessible, the graphics chip in Commodore's computer instead favoured 2D effects through hardware sprite support (then rarely seen on a home computer). Nevertheless, Crammond stuck with solid-shaded 3D for his next project *The Sentinel*, a foray into strategy gaming, before resuming his experiments with real-world simulation in the game that would literally push the 3D racing genre to new heights.

While those halcyon days of gaming are typified by lone programmers crafting masterpieces in their bedrooms, the reality was rather more mundane and originality a surprisingly scarce commodity. Many programmers simply looked to the charts for inspiration, or at least the technologically superior fare of the arcades, rather than letting the design grow naturally through experiments with visual styles, control systems or environmental choices.

"*Stunt Car Racer* was definitely a good example of a game evolving over several months," says Crammond. Needless to say, the starting point was another of Crammond's dynamic vehicle simulations, this time dropped in a more abstract 3D environment than the formulaic 3D tracks depicted in *Revs*: "I had started with a sort of roving vehicle on a rough random terrain, thinking the system might become a tank shoot 'em up-type game. One day I was driving this vehicle over the landscape bouncing around and came across a bit of the random surface which formed a small ramp. I drove up it and launched into the air. I found this to be the highlight of the 'trip' and that started me thinking."

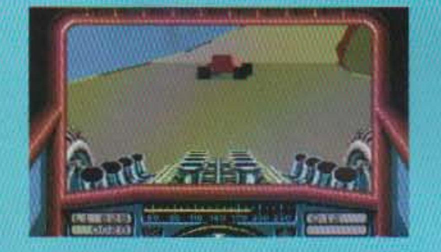
Soon he had ditched the idea of an undulating landscape, instead creating a flat environment upon which a network of ramps could be placed, those initial thoughts about a combat bias giving way to a design focused on stuntwork. Further refinement of the way the jumps could be integrated into the environment followed. "It became obvious fairly quickly that locating the ramps was too difficult, particularly lining up with them, so I decided they had to be joined by a track," says Crammond. "I didn't want cornering speed to be the main feature, as it is with road racing, so I banked the corners. Then I started experimenting with the height profiles to create some interesting new challenges."

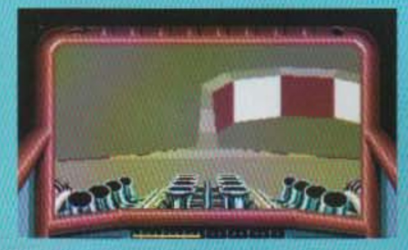
With the concept of a high-rise, rollercoaster-like track in place, Crammond's initial intention was to make the game a pure driving experience, with players simply facing a challenge to beat lap times: "I remembered how much I had enjoyed honing my lap times in *Revs*, and also to some extent was thinking about the overhead in processor time involved with including anything more than the player car. Eventually, however, I decided that it had to involve a race against an opponent. Once I'd managed to implement that, I had the basic game. The addition of damage and speed boosts then spiced up the challenge."

Although relatively simple, this formula proved highly effective, principally because of the learning curve and depth imbued by the careful vehicle modelling and associated control system, but also because of some wonderfully malicious track layouts. "Coming up with the track designs was probably the hardest thing," says Crammond. "But although it was hard work I did enjoy working on them and trying out new ideas."

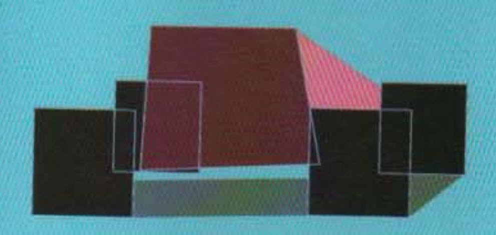
Split over four racing divisions, a total of eight circuits were included. While introductory track 'The Little Ramp' served merely to familiarise players with the intricacies of a control system far more temperamental than in the likes of contemporary coin-op hit *OutRun*, others, such as 'The Stepping Stones' and 'The Big Ramp', demanded near-flawless use of the accelerator and boost controls. One badly timed jump would result in the car leaping into the air only to sail right past the edge of the track, tumbling to the ground a hundred feet below.

Final track, 'The Drawbridge', even required drivers to time their leap with the lowering of the bridge, or else face being spectacularly catapulted clean off the track. In addition to inducing a surprising amount of vertigo, such tumbles seriously damaged the stunt car chassis and also incurred delays while the car was laboriously winched back up onto the circuit. In truth this latter device penalised the player too harshly, making it almost impossible to





Aside from a poor-quality Team 17 stunt car game released a couple of years ago, *Stunt Car Racer* inspired surprisingly few imitators. But its blend of physics simulation and arcade aesthetics have doubtless inspired countless other driving games



turn in an acceptable performance. But many gamers were willing to overlook this, so strong was their desire to see all the available tracks and nail the fastest possible lap times

Although *Stunt Car Racer* was the result of more than two years of intense work (an extraordinarily long development period at the time), Crammond confesses he was far from certain how the game would be received: "*Aviator*, *Revs* and *Sentinel* had all been number-one games, but you can never assume something is going to be a hit, particularly if it is an original concept."

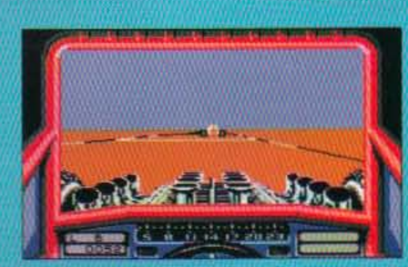
In fact the game scaled to the top of the chart, the success prompting conversions to other formats, with Crammond recoding the game for the next generation of home computers, the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga. It speaks volumes about the quality of the original version that few adjustments were necessary, although one key enhancement would ultimately bestow *Stunt Car Racer* with near-legendary status. "I thought it would be cool to play against a real opponent, so did a serial-link twoplayer option – it turned out to be very popular," says Crammond, with a certain amount of understatement.

What happened next

Since then Crammond has devoted his time to thoroughbred racing simulations with the *Grand Prix* series. The need to radically ramp up the complexity of the visuals, physics simulation and various supporting game elements have, he admits, necessitated a shift to a team-based development model: "The good thing about those days was having complete knowledge of the code. I could feel confident about its integrity and the effects of any change. *F1GP* and *Grand Prix* were done like this except I didn't know the menu code. In *Grand Prix 3* I didn't know the menu code and hardware graphics code, then in *Grand Prix 4* I only really knew the simulation code. The fact is that modern games are simply too big to be done by an individual."

For this reason he has opted to collaborate with UK development team Lost Toys for his next project. Some 14 years on from the Amiga and ST versions, work is about to commence on *Stunt Car Racer Pro*. "At the end of almost every interview I ever did for the last three *Grand Prix* games there was always one last question: 'When are you going to do a new version of *Stunt Car Racer*?'," admits Crammond. "There's clearly still a huge amount of interest in the *Stunt Car* concept. I think it's a great game and it's a great challenge thinking up ways to take advantage of the new technologies which have emerged since the original came out. In particular there will be the ability for people to race each other across the Internet, opening up a huge new area of gameplay challenges."

Stunt Car Racer did not inspire many clones, but you can play an obvious homage on Sony Ericsson's P800 mobile. The game comes bundled with the phone and proves quite enjoyable, despite being a little fiddly





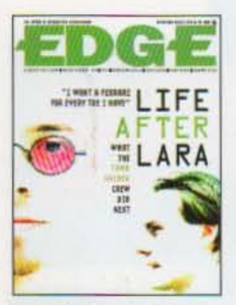
Without the luxury of the kind of 'driving aids' that would ease the learning curve in his *Grand Prix* titles, Geoff Crammond's *Stunt Car Racer* drove some gamers to distraction (Commodore 64 and Sinclair ZX Spectrum versions shown above)

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 61, August 1998

Ah, sweet hindsight. Where would Reset be without you? Floundering in the past, that's where, just like the cover star of **E**61. "I want a Ferrari for every toe I have," beamed **Toby Gard**, while the other coverline promised to show "What the *Tomb Raider* crew did next." Five years on, and we're still waiting to find out. Also in **E**61, features on animation and 'interactive toys' proved fascinating, as did the review of Amazing Studio's less-than-amazing *Heart of Darkness*. Six years in development, and four out of ten. So, extrapolating, something in development for five years so far...

Oh, enough with the negativity, Reset. Besides, you drew that comparison last issue. What was thrilling in 1998? Well, early shots of *Thief* and *Giants* looked intriguing, and another set of *Zelda 64* screens gave the game a place in history for Most Appearances in **Edge**. But a feature on MAME (the now-famous Multi Arcade Machine Emulator) was the real star of the issue, featured here in v0.31 form and compatible with over 590 games. Skip forward to 2003, and v0.68 of MAME supports well over 2000 different romsets. Half a decade well spent, thinks **Edge**. Et tu, Toby?

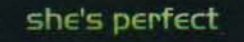
DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"If we do another platform we will have to get a lot more people in, and we might start slipping our release date," Paul Douglas responds. Galleon's estimated release date, according to **E**61? The far side of Christmas 1998.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"You're developing only on PC at the moment. Given the supposed compatibility between the two platforms, is Dreamcast something you would be interested in?" **Edge** wonders if Gard and Co have any plans to bring Galleon to Sega's recently announced system.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Banjo-Kazooie (N64, 8/10); *Colin McRae Rally* (PS, 9/10); *Sentinel Returns* (PC/PS, 7/10); *Breath of Fire III* (PS, 6/10); *X-Com: Interceptor* (PC, 8/10); *Wargames* (PC, 7/10); *Final Fantasy VII* (PC, 9/10); *Nightmare Creatures* (PC, 7/10); *XI* (PS, 8/10); *MDK* (Mac, 8/10)



1



2



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4



5



6

1. *Galleon*'s Rhama, before the press was banned from calling it *Tomb Raider With Pirates* 2. Rare's teaser Webpage for *Perfect Dark* 3. Roger Sanchez attempts to mix and load *Gran Turismo* simultaneously 4. It all gets too much for Martin Kenwright 5. **Edge** goes shopping in Japan, and finds a *Virtua Fighter 3* board 6. The *Sentinel Returns*, and **Edge** says 7/10

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Michael Powell, MD of Argonaut Sheffield, remembers going around in circles





Powell crashed and burned playing *Indianapolis 500*, often. He has no desire to do it again

Okay, we'd had *Revs* from Geoff Crammond and *Ferrari Formula One* on the Amiga, but the racing game that really started it all for me was *Indianapolis 500* by David Kaemmer's Papyrus.

The Indy 500 was an unlikely event to get excited about in game terms – 33 cars do 200 laps round an oval circuit with four left turns. And to even attempt it on the 8Mhz PCs of the day seemed like suicide. But, using only 30 polygons per frame, Papyrus created a masterpiece of the day. And the thing was, it wasn't about the racing, it was about the crashing.

Everyone tried it – start the race, do a U-turn then drive at 240mph directly at 32 cars heading straight for you. The resulting simulated mayhem was spectacular in the extreme with cars flying in all directions. Once you'd watched the replay from a dozen different angles and proved how good the car physics was – just try and race without crashing. I never met anyone who did all 200 laps though.

I haven't played *Indy 500* for over ten years and have no intention of ever trying to. I think with retro games you're best left with the memories and the feelings you had about them at the time. Load a ten-year old game up now and you won't understand why you ever thought it was anything. Down with emulators!

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

Possibly the greatest proofreading mistake of any magazine, ever. **Edge**, I love you dearly, but I think your production department needs a swift ? up the ?.
Constantine Butler

I used to be totally against the removal of review scores, and could list many arguments as to why they should stay. But I was pleasantly surprised when I instinctively turned to the *Soul Calibur II* score before starting to read the review only to find a question mark. It made me realise that the score would loom over my mind like a shadow; whenever I read a review about the game; whenever I think about the game; whenever I think about buying the game; even when I think about playing the game. The problem is that once you see the score you'll always think of a game as 5/10 or 9/10, or 7/10 but you don't think about the actual merits of the game itself. By reading the review and not attaching a score it's possible to enjoy the game more because you're not sub-consciously thinking of it as a 5/10 game, making you look for its faults.

Wouldn't you enjoy a game more if you didn't have people constantly telling you how crap it is? Imagine waiting for the sequel to a favourite game, then the disappointment when **Edge** lands on the doorstep and it's been awarded 4/10. Immediately, without playing the game, without reading a single review, any enthusiasm is diminished and the game settles in the mind as poor/average. Now if you'd just played the game you'd probably have enjoyed it more – perhaps that's why games such as *Uplink* and *Serious Sam* are so much fun; because nobody expected much from them. I'm sure that, had they been released as 'proper' games, they would have received average reviews and apathy would have settled in. And as much as anyone would like to think of themselves as independent minded and unaffected by review scores, I think most people generally are.

That's why review scores should go. They may hype up the truly great games but if a game is great, then it doesn't need a good review score anyway. Scores are merely marketing tools that encourage the hit-driven nature of the industry.
Mr T

After the (quasi) disappearance of review scores in **E**124, I couldn't help thinking that their continued absence could be almost as compelling as Biffo's monthly column of undiluted madness. Surely **Edge**'s target audience is quite capable of managing without this incredibly 'correct' evaluation technique? The general feel of a game can be very easily gauged from the text alone.

Ever since the many letter-page debates on 'Digi' regarding their use of percentages, I have thought that the lack of a digit at the bottom of every review would be of great benefit to any magazine. Not only could it perhaps encourage an even higher standard of writing, it would also eliminate much grief on Internet message boards from zealots concerned about 'biased' scores.

Although there is more chance of an enjoyable *Army Men* game than there is the likelihood that scores will be dropped from your publication, I am sure that a greater need for reader interpretation would be very welcome.
Alexander Green

Last issue's review score experiment provoked a wide range of responses from readers. Perhaps disappointingly, from **Edge**'s perspective at least, the vast majority of these were from readers who hadn't noticed either the explanation on p87 of why scores had been replaced with question marks, or the round-up of scores on p106.

It was interesting that we received a substantial amount of correspondence concerning what scores particular games received and why (as we do after any issue), but relatively little debate regarding the question of whether to award scores at all. It would seem therefore that the vast majority of our readers remain firmly in favour of maintaining review scores (and as astute readers will have noticed, they have returned this issue – and will remain for the foreseeable future). But please note that **Edge** will not be offering compensation, in the form of t-shirts, free subscriptions, or replacement copies of issue 125.

I gather from Simon Harvey's comments in the 'Game Stars' article in **E**123 that videogaming does not yet qualify as mainstream. I beg your pardon. Forget all that nonsense about selling billions of games every year to a worldwide audience. Forget about the huge magazine publishing industry which is supported by the videogaming industry. Forget those statistics pointing to the fact that Mario is more widely recognised than Mickey Mouse. Apparently mainstream status is entirely dependent upon being represented by the right kind of television programme. Of course it just so happens that Barrington Harvey is currently working on such a programme, so it's not as though he'd have a vested interest in making such a claim.

At one point Mr Harvey laments the misrepresentation of game-playing folk saying, "We have tended to ghettoise our spokespeople by pigeonholing them from the off." Yet only seconds later he himself is trotting out a string of tired old clichés about how "the hardcore audience has brought the industry to where it is. But in order to truly take gaming into the mainstream, we need to break free from those shackles and treat videogaming as a fun and entertaining pastime, not the obsession of the hardcore." Who exactly is doing the pigeonholing I ask you? I guess we should feel lucky to be surrounded by these noble PR people. Who else would take it upon themselves to save gaming from the very people who like gaming?

It is of course quite within the prerogative of a company like Barrington Harvey to try and cash in on the current appetite for 'Pop Idol'-type programming. But is it really necessary for it to dress it up as though it was only doing it because it cares so deeply about the cruel misrepresentation of videogames? Obviously I'm

> "Scores should go. If a game is great, then it doesn't need a good review score anyway. Scores are merely marketing tools that encourage the hit-driven nature of the industry"



'Game Stars' continues to upset some readers. Take comfort from the 5.5m viewing figure and what this might mean for next year's programme

speaking here as one of the cynical and jaded hardcore audience, but if your crusade to liberate gaming consists of nothing other than irredeemable, formulaic television programming and increased tabloid coverage then don't do me any favours.
Stephen Hull

Videogames and videogaming are not mainstream. In terms of units sold, and audience reached, videogames are massively inferior to virtually every other form of entertainment activity. Sure, the revenues generated by the industry are substantial, but this is largely due to the fact that the unit cost to the consumer is so astonishingly high. The 'huge magazine publishing industry' that you mention isn't as large as you seem to think, and it continues to be marginalised by the mainstream media in a number of different ways. As for Mario being more recognisable than Mickey Mouse, that conclusion is based on a very old survey, and Mickey isn't even Disney's preeminent mascot any more. While you have every right to criticise 'Game Stars', the fact is that the show wasn't a bid to save gaming from the people who love it, but a bid to present videogames to a wider audience; one which doesn't yet know whether it loves gaming or not. This isn't a crusade to liberate gaming; it's a bid to share gaming for the potential benefit of all.

Following the prescreen introduction in **E**123 I must confess that the pursuit of photorealism, despite being the Holy Grail of programmers the world over is beginning to seem more than a little tired. I am becoming more of the opinion that the way in which a videogame is presented is far more important than real world accuracy. More than this though, the style of a game can be just as significant as the quality of the gameplay. Undoubtedly it is how a game plays that determines how much we enjoy the experience, but it is often the little touches that stay with you once the credits roll. Images of *Jet Set Radio* and *Rez* will forever stay burned into my memory. Who will ever forget their first encounter with *R-Type*'s first level boss – its skeletal tail and gaping jaw concealing the fact that it was simple to defeat.

This also goes beyond graphical flair as well. *Mortal Kombat*'s inaccurate controls and uninspired gameplay vanishes in my mind next to its adrenaline-inducing soundtrack overlaid with a fearsome voice declaring another fatality. There can be little doubt that a game's style can make or break the sales figures, a fact clearly displayed by *Vice City*'s astounding sales compared to the meagre performance of *Jet Set Radio*. As much as this may trouble some die-hards out there, perhaps new and original methods of presenting videogames are just as important as gameplay tweaks, and focus-tested design. Once again, it seems that Sega, Nintendo and the viewtiful Capcom are well ahead of the pack.
Edward Brown

I'm writing in response to Mesut Serbest (**E**123) to point out why John Carmack is far from just an 'average' programmer. I think the central flaw of his 'analysis' is summed up in by his statement that Carmack's code contained no "conformism to coding conventions." It is exactly this that marks his greatness.

Has Mesut considered that the code he's looking at and criticising was designed to run smoothly on a system which was more than 50 times slower than today's low spec systems, on a fraction of today's RAM with *no* 3D hardware support? The reason John Carmack stands out as a programmer is because he consistently pushes the boundaries of the technology he is working on. With *Wolfenstein 3D* he and his partner (John Romero – the artist) double handedly created the entire FPS genre. And this would not have been possible if he hadn't come up with an ingenious way for 16MHz systems to simulate a 3D world.

While the coding world was still trying to get a handle on exactly what he had done, he released *Doom* which, using a variation of the same technique, took the playing field to a whole new level. Nowadays this technique which he created is taught to developers as the standard 2.5D engine.

And what about *Quake* and *Quake II*? Has anyone heard of the term 'BSP engine'? It's only the rendering technology used by about 98 per cent of the 3D games out there, as it gives level designers the chance to create much more complex levels without having to worry about loss of framerate. Guess who was the first person to translate the idea from an ancient textbook into a the fun-filled fragfest that is *Quake*? I'll give you a clue, He is considered by certain people (person) be a "merely average" programmer.

Of course, all this doesn't make John Carmack stand out in any way. After all, his code is so untidy and his AI is hard coded! Look he doesn't even comment his code properly. It is a sad day for creativity when genius is measured by conformity.
Uyi Isibor

As a western gamer living in Japan, I find myself in an interesting position. I came to Japan with many preconceptions and, I must admit, wearing slightly rose-tinged glasses. During the 12 months I've lived here, pretty much every one of my preconceptions has been blown away. The view that Japan is a videogame wonderland, for example. A place where gaming is acceptable; a place where the breadth of software means there's always going to be something for everyone. It isn't. The Japanese game industry is a lot like most other industries, and many western ones; extremely narrow-minded and domestically driven.

Japan is an interesting place, to be sure, and the 'Terebi Geemu' as a form of entertainment is undeniably given much more respect than it is in the west, but Japanese console gamers are fed almost exclusively Japanese products. This creates an odd ethno-phobia which is difficult to define. My point is this; don't get too worked up if a Japanese game doesn't get a release in the west, since there are plenty of games from other countries to enjoy.
David L, Osaka

"This may trouble some die-hards, but perhaps new and original methods of presenting videogames are just as important as gameplay tweaks, and focus-tested design"

Next month



Edge leaves European game development in sleepy summer mode and goes off in search of some enticing software


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